MRS. MOONLIGHT

A Piece of Pastiche in Three Acts

BY

BENN W. LEVY

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SAMUEL FRENCH
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To
MY FATHER

French 037 73"

27768

The play was first publicly performed in America on September 29th, 1930, at the CHARLES HOPKINS THEATRE, *New York, with the following cast:*

Tom Moonlight	GUY STANDING
Minnie	HAIDEE WRIGHT
Edith Jones	KATHRYN COLLIER
Sarah Moonlight	EDITH BARRETT
Percy Middling	LEO G. CARROLL
Jane Moonlight	KATHERINE STANDING
Willie Ragg	VERNON KELSO
Peter	JOHN ROSS

The play was first publicly performed on December 5th, 1928, at the KINGSWAY THEATRE, *London, with the following cast:*

Tom Moonlight	LEON QUARTERMAINE
Minnie	FRANCES ROSS-CAMPBELL
Edith Jones	MARY BARTON
Sarah Moonlight	JOAN BARRY
Percy Middling	BLIGH CHESMOND
Jane Moonlight	ALISON LEGGAT
Willie Ragg	WALTER PEARCE
Peter	ROBERT DOUGLAS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

(in the order of their first appearance)

TOM MOONLIGHT
MINNIE
EDITH JONES
SARAH MOONLIGHT
PERCY MIDDLING
JANE MOONLIGHT
WILLIE RAGG
PETER

MRS. MOONLIGHT

ACT ONE

After breakfast on Sunday morning—it is September 3rd, 1881—MR. TOM MOONLIGHT *reads his Sunday newspaper. His tingling sense of physical well-being after so good a breakfast and so good a shave is such that the near prospect of church becomes almost a pleasure. But this particular Sunday tingles even more keenly than the other fifty-one in the year, as we shall very soon understand. And so it is that the minor earthquake reported in the morning news assumes for* MR. MOONLIGHT *less importance than the correct tailing-off of his own coveted whiskers, in which* MR. MOONLIGHT [*who, after all, is only a few years the wrong side of forty*] *takes an excusable pride. It is merely his bad luck that no sooner has he finally abandoned that Sunday newspaper, and taken to whisker-trimming in real earnest with the scissors from his penknife and the mirror in the overmantel, that* MINNIE *should intrude upon his privacy:* MINNIE, *who, we can all tell at a glance, is just the kind of person to misunderstand such an occupation. It is not because she wears an apron that we can tell this, but merely that our knowledge of men and women, which has always been pretty sound, assures us that so forthright, unconciliatory a countenance, perched upon so nondescript a little body, could never conceal that degree of sympathetic understanding which appreciates that whiskers, like everything else in this unmanageable world, need caring for, even on a Sunday.*

But MR. MOONLIGHT *is not the man to be put out of countenance. He sticks to his guns; which is to say, his penknife.*

TOM. [*Scowling.*] What do *you* want?

MINNIE. [*The insubordinate creature.*] Oh, I just thought it might do me good to watch how an Englishman improves his mind a Sabbath morning.

[*Yes, we might have guessed it; one of the strongest Highland accents we have heard. Come to think of it, we did guess it.*]

TOM. Well, that's not what I pay you for.

MINNIE. No, I throw that in extra. *I'm* not mean.

TOM. [*Petulantly.*] Nor am I.

MINNIE. A Scotsman wouldn't forget his wife's birthday.

TOM. No, he mightn't *forget* it. [*He thinks he has scored this time.*]

MINNIE. Whatever else we may be, no one could ever say we were mean.

TOM. Heaven preserve me!

MINNIE. Nothing will preserve you if you add blasphemy to your other sins. [*Then, in a tone that* DIVES *might use to* LAZARUS.] Still, I'll pray for you this morning, if you like.

TOM. I don't like.

MINNIE. As you will. Did you ever read the story of Scrooge?

TOM. Yes. Why?

MINNIE. No reason. Only that he was the kind of man to forget his wife's birthday.

TOM. [*His temper rising.*] I did *not* forget it. [*He makes a vicious snip at the poor whisker.*] It's coming home this morning.

MINNIE. [*Skeptical.*] Sunday?

TOM. A special errand-boy.

MINNIE. [*Unappeased.*] A bit late.

TOM. I tell you it's not my fault It should have been ready yesterday when I called. Something hadn't arrived.

MINNIE. So they promised to send it here this morning?

TOM. Yes. And I hate having fault found with me.

MINNIE. [*The ignorant woman dares to be sarcastic!*] Most people like it. What is it?

TOM. What is what, madam?

MINNIE. Your poor wee giftie.

TOM. Mind your own business. [*What a way for a grown-up man to behave!*] And it isn't poor; nor wee.

MINNIE. [*The shameful doubter.*] We'll see.

TOM. Why aren't you looking after my daughter, woman?

MINNIE. Do you mean Jane?

TOM. Who in—in the world do you *suppose* I mean?

MINNIE. She's with her lovely parent, she is.

TOM. [*A poor attempt to regain dignity.*] Do you mean Mrs. Moonlight?

MINNIE. [*Who would never allow that.*] Who in the world do you *suppose* I mean?

TOM. [*Justifiably exasperated.*] You're a most disagreeable old woman.

MINNIE. You're in your forty-fourth year; I'm in my thirty-ninth.

TOM. But *my* forty-fourth year only contains twelve months.

MINNIE. Your collar's turned up at the back.

TOM. [*A beaten man.*] I know. I like it like that. [*He pretends to read a line or two of his newspaper.*] By the way, Minnie, I've been thinking quite seriously of giving you notice.

MINNIE. If it weren't for your sweet wife I'd let you. Do you suppose I'd be here if she went?

TOM. [*Loftily.*] Yes, I think you would. In your own queer barbaric Scotch way you're really very attached to me. Still, I'm afraid I shall have to dismiss you. In many ways you don't quite suit.

MINNIE. [*With impatient contempt.*] Ah, away with you! Why do you try to talk so grand? Consider yourself lucky to be living in the same house with us.

TOM. With us, madam?

MINNIE. With Sarah Moonlight and me and wee Jane.

TOM. Has it ever occurred to you that I pay for this house?

MINNIE. And you should be glad to do it, and not bother us.

TOM. Has it occurred to you I might never have consented to marry Sarah if I'd known it meant taking you on as well?

MINNIE. *Consented* to marry Sarah? Did *she* ask *you?* I seem to remember a very doleful and forlorn suitor, mooning about till I thought he was fey, pale in the cheek, pink in the eye, waiting hungrily for a smile or word from Sarah, his arms for ever full of posies; a very foolish loon.

TOM. [*Thundering.*] Woman, be silent!

[*Now, how should* MINNIE *have gained the knowledge of men to guess that this is one of* TOM'S *most vulnerable spots?*]

MINNIE. Nobody could have known in those days that this was the man who would forget his wife's birthday.

[*Oh, the nagging woman!*]

TOM. [*After several fruitless attempts at articulation.*] Creature, answer the bell!

[*Yes, we have heard it too, and so has* MINNIE, *for she is already on her way.*]

MINNIE. It's your poor wee giftie, I expect.

[*And she is gone. Alone* MR. MOONLIGHT *can adjust his collar without impairing his dignity. When* MINNIE *returns, it is not with a parcel, but with* MRS. MOONLIGHT'S *sister.*

Exercising that intuition of ours again, how at first glance do we sum up EDITH JONES? *Thirty-five or thereabouts? A trifle severe? A shade discontented? We have not time to go into it further, for she is speaking.*]

EDITH. Good morning, Thomas.

TOM. And good morning to you, my dear Edith. How are you?

EDITH. Nicely, I thank you. Where is Sarah?

TOM. Sarah is not yet down.

[EDITH *sniffs. We thought she would.*]

EDITH. It's half-past ten.

TOM. [*For the defense.*] She wasn't in bed till midnight last night.

EDITH. A party?

TOM. Yes, a little party.

[*Hang it,* EDITH JONES *sniffs again!*]

EDITH. Well, maybe if I had a husband he would indulge *me* no less.

TOM. Maybe.

[TOM!]

EDITH. Still, that doesn't make it right. You're looking very well to-day.

MINNIE. For pity's sake don't tell him that.

TOM. Minnie, be quiet. A little gayety occasionally agrees with me, But, 'pon my word, I was just about to say the same of you, my dear Edith. You're looking well; deuced well, if I may say so.

EDITH. [*With dignity and no self-pity.*] Cinderella's ugly sisters never look well.

TOM. My dear Edith, Sarah has no ugly sisters. Indeed, you're not *really* even her sister, are you?

EDITH. You do not need to remind me, Thomas, that I was only a foundling child charitably adopted by Sarah's parents. I am quite conscious already that I am not *really* Sarah's sister.

TOM. [*Distressed by her touchiness.*] My dear Edith, you are so quick to take offense. You know quite well that you are all that a real sister could be to Sarah, and more: an extremely well-beloved elder sister.

EDITH. Older by nearly ten years, and it looks like twenty.

TOM. [*Not too tactfully.*] Well, Sarah looks particularly young for her age. She wishes she didn't. You know, that's her sore point.

EDITH. You needn't make excuses for me. I'm not vain.

TOM. My dear Edith, I wasn't attempting to. And, if you'll allow me to say so, you have, in my humble opinion, an indefinable charm and dignity of which every one must constantly be conscious.

EDITH. [*With unexpected vehemence.*] I'm not your dear Edith! And you can keep your nasty philandering ways for those that like it, Thomas Moonlight.

TOM. [*Quietly.*] I beg your pardon. [*He turns away. And, as he does so,* EDITH JONES *can barely check a relenting gesture, a gesture that to us sharper ones almost suggests . . . but we shall see.* TOM'S *voice, when he speaks next, is suitably distant.*] Minnie, will you please inform Mrs. Moonlight that her sister has called to accompany us to church.

MINNIE. It's not nearly time for church.

[MINNIE, *who has been grimly knitting with innumerable clacking needles—as, indeed, she does at all odd moments —perched on her own particular corner of the high fender, her short legs a-dangle half a yard from the ground, doesn't budge.*]

EDITH. I came early to see Jane.

MINNIE. She's with her mother.

A VOICE. No, she's not. [*Yes, it's* SARAH MOONLIGHT. *But oh, she is so pretty! Can this blooming young creature really have a daughter of five?*] Good morning, Edith dear.

[*They kiss each other characteristically.*]

EDITH. Many happy returns of the day. Here's my present.

[*She hands* SARAH *a parcel, and sits as one who has discharged a disagreeable duty.*]

SARAH. Oh, you are kind to me. What is it?

EDITH. I'm afraid you may not like it.

SARAH. [*Gayly tackling the string.*] Is that why you chose it?

EDITH. No; but there's always the chance.

MINNIE. There's always the chance.

SARAH. [*Her tone involuntarily despondent as she extracts something from the parcel.*] Oh, a shawl! [*But she recovers clumsily.*] I mean—oh, a shawl! [*This time she says it with bright enthusiasm.*] What a lovely one!

[TOM, *who is laughing, though he knows quite well he shouldn't, receives a private grimace from his wife.*]

EDITH. [*Almost with satisfaction.*] I thought you wouldn't like it.

SARAH. But I do, my dear. I think it's sweet.

MINNIE. And on a Sabbath, too!

TOM. Will you be silent, woman!

EDITH. [*Placidly.*] Leave her alone, Thomas. Minnie is right.

SARAH. [*Coaxing prettily.*] You shouldn't be so sensitive, dear. I've said nothing to make you think I'm not very, very pleased with my shawl.

EDITH. I can see a thing when it's plain before my nose. You don't like it because you think shawls are for old people.

SARAH. Oh, Edith, how absurd!

EDITH. Well, middle-aged people. But, if you don't look middle-aged yourself, at least you're a mother and a married woman.

TOM. [*Imprudently.*] I should hope so.

EDITH. [*Unruffled.*] And married to a middle-aged man.

TOM. [*Outraged.*] I'm barely over forty!

EDITH. Forty-four is more than half of eighty, and who knows that you won't die at sixty. You think too much of your age, and such vanity, both of you.

SARAH. [*Suddenly sobered; strangely.*] Do you think *I* do, Edith?

EDITH. Since you ask me, I do. You dress too young. Several people have mentioned it.

TOM. The cats are envious. Sarah doesn't dress young; she looks young.

EDITH. Put it which way you like. But answer me this: did Sarah look a day younger at twenty-one or twenty or nineteen than she does to-day?

TOM. [*Reluctantly.*] Well—no. But is that a crime?

EDITH. I didn't say so.

SARAH. [*Strangely serious.*] Do you *think* so?

EDITH. It's hardly my business.

SARAH. [*With the same slow urgency.*] Please answer me, Edith.

EDITH. Then I think it's not a crime, but—but bad taste. Some one said the other day you powder your nose.

[*But* SARAH *doesn't smile.*]

SARAH. And if I don't? If it's not my fault that I don't seem to change much?

EDITH. Whose fault can it be?

SARAH. But just supposing? It wouldn't be bad taste then?

EDITH. [*Not quite at ease.*] Then I should say it was—odd.

SARAH. What do you mean by "odd"?

EDITH. Just odd.

[TOM *has been vainly signaling* EDITH *to evade this subject.*]

SARAH. I see. [*The silence is a trifle oppressive, as* SARAH *stands thoughtfully twisting a letter that she holds in her hand. Then suddenly, with a little effort, she breaks the spell, speaking in her old gay fashion.*] Who do you think this is from? [*She holds the letter aloft.*] You'll never guess. It came last night.

EDITH. I don't know. Who is it from?

SARAH. Maud.

EDITH. [*With awe.*] From your sister Maud?

SARAH. [*Mimicking.*] Yes, and *your* sister Maud.

EDITH. What does she want?

SARAH. She wants to tell me that she's just had a baby.

EDITH. [*Though her sniff expresses more than her words.*] As brazen as ever. Though what can you expect? Especially living in those foreign parts.

SARAH. And with a foreign husband.

EDITH. Carlo is *not* her husband.

SARAH. [*With a little toss.*] *I* consider him her husband.

EDITH. Very likely. But God doesn't.

SARAH. How do *you* know?

EDITH. Don't be irreverent, Sarah. It doesn't become you. Do you often hear from her, pray?

SARAH. This is the first letter for two years—since she went away. I wrote to her twice, but she didn't answer. After the way her family treated her, I'm not surprised. She had some pride.

EDITH. May I ask if you expect a family to rejoice and make merry when their daughter runs off with a married man?

SARAH. It wasn't her fault that he was married.

EDITH. It was her fault that she ran off with him.

SARAH. She loved him.

EDITH. Then she shouldn't have fallen in love with a married man.

SARAH. Do you really suppose a woman can stop herself falling in love just because a man is married?

[*Poor* EDITH *drops her eyes.*]

EDITH. [*Rather quietly.*] I don't say it's easy, but—but it can be done. [SARAH *wishes she had not asked the question.*] I suppose you won't answer the letter?

SARAH. I think I shall, Edith.

EDITH. [*To* TOM.] Do you propose to let her?

TOM. Well, of course I *could* put my foot down, but—

SARAH. Could you, darling?

TOM. Of course I could! Indeed, I've a good mind to. What do you mean?

SARAH. Only that I know you'd never do anything to make me unhappy.

TOM. [*Taking his foot up again.*] I was merely going to say it's not a question for me so much as for Sarah and her own conscience.

EDITH. [*Sniffing.*] Very modern, I'm sure.

TOM. [*Not displeased.*] Well, we must be broad-minded, you know. After all, Maud's husband's—er—wife—er—what would you call her exactly, dear?

SARAH. How about Maud's wife-in-law?

TOM. Well, anyway, Carlo's real wife—first wife—

EDITH. [*Emphatically.*] Real wife, legal wife, only wife.

TOM. Yes; yes, that's the one I mean. I was merely going to say that, after all, she *is* a deuced disagreeable woman.

EDITH. Just because she doesn't choose to divorce her husband?

TOM. Well, she doesn't want him herself, you know. You remember the dog in the manger.

EDITH. Matrimonial problems have never seemed to me

best solved by comparisons from the farmyard. But, in any case, Carlo and his wife are both Catholics. The Pope wouldn't allow her a divorce, even if she wanted one.

TOM. Of course, I'm a Protestant myself, but it seems a little hard to blame it on the Pope.

[*We hear the bell again, and* MINNIE *goes to answer it.*]

EDITH. [*Quite properly disregarding* TOM'S *last contribution.*] Is it a boy or a girl?

SARAH. A girl.

EDITH. Poor little mite has a pretty future before her! What have they called her?

SARAH. Joy.

EDITH. Ironically, I presume.

SARAH. Don't let's be pessimistic. Perhaps people aren't so particular in Florence.

EDITH. Do they still live in Florence?

SARAH. Of course. His work is there. [*Reading the address from her letter.*] Villa Caneloni, Piazza del Santa Catrina, Florence.

[*She puts the letter away in* TOM'S *desk, and turns to find* MINNIE, *reappeared and holding in her arms a large parcel. To* TOM'S *triumphant grin that aggravating* MINNIE *merely returns a scowl.*]

MINNIE. [*Holding it to* SARAH.] Here it is.

SARAH. Here what is?

TOM. A little birthday present from me, my dear.

SARAH. Oh, Tom, you're an angel.

MINNIE. [*Resuming her fender seat.*] A very unpunctual angel!

SARAH. Very likely. He's that kind of angel.

MINNIE. Angels don't forget their wives' birthdays.

TOM. Angels don't have wives.

MINNIE. And what do they have, then?

TOM. They have—I don't know what they have! Anyway, it's no business of yours, and never will be!

SARAH. Besides, he didn't forget my birthday. This is a second present. I have had one already.

[*She is undoing the parcel.*]

MINNIE. What was it?

SARAH. A little bag.

MINNIE He didn't tell *me* anything about it.

TOM. [*Loftily.*] I didn't choose to.

MINNIE. What kind of a bag?

SARAH. A little canvas bag.

MINNIE. Anything in it?

SARAH. Yes, sovereigns.

MINNIE. Chocolate ones?

SARAH. No, gold ones.

MINNIE. How many?

SARAH. Fifty.

MINNIE. Have you counted them?

SARAH. No. And you're a nasty disagreeable old curmudgeon, and you're not to tease him. Oh, Tom! A dress! [*And she lifts from the box a splendor of pink velvet, cream lace, and pale blue bows, her eyes gleaming brighter at each new glory revealed.*] Oh, Tom dear! [*She hugs him and she hugs him.*] Mr. Moonlight! Darling Mr. Moonlight! Darling Mr. Moonlight! [*And* MR. MOONLIGHT *holds her close.*] What made you?

TOM. I just had an idea.

SARAH. Oh, Tom! Here, Minnie, undo me. [*She presents her back.*]

EDITH. For goodness's sake, what are you going to do?

SARAH. Try it on.

EDITH. Here?

MINNIE. And why not here? He's her husband, isn't he?

[*By now her frock is about her feet, and, as she steps out, even the most tolerant of us can scare forbear to smile. Those layers of stiff silk petticoats, and at least one of them purple silk! The frothy lace billowing above corsets so relentless that her plump little figure resembles nothing so much as an hourglass!*]

SARAH. [*Crooning, purring.*] There isn't such another dress in Europe!

TOM. [*Modestly.*] As a matter of fact, I designed it myself.

SARAH. Oh, Tom!

TOM. At least, Madame Chose and I did together. I'd been giving quite a lot of thought to it, and felt that you in pink velvet—

SARAH. Who thought of these bows?

TOM. Er—Madame Chose thought of them.

SARAH. Oh, Minnie, isn't it too lovely?

MINNIE. The bows are not too bad.

SARAH. Horrid creature! Edith, what do you think?

EDITH. [*Softening before such delight.*] It's a very pretty frock, my dear.

SARAH. Dear Edith!

[*The dress is on, and* SARAH *stands still, like a happy child.*]

TOM. [*Proudly.*] It's not too bad; upon my word, it's not too bad.

SARAH. I'm a queer, I'm a queen!

MINNIE. What trinkets will you wear?

SARAH. Yes, Tom, what jewelry? My crystals?

EDITH. It wants something with a touch of blue.

SARAH. I don't think I have anything blue.

TOM. Yes, you have, my dear. The what-you-may-call-it. You know. You haven't worn it for years and years. The Dreird.

SARAH. No! [*It is almost a scream; a cry of fear.*]

TOM. [*In gentle surprise.*] My dear!

[*She avoids his eye; she avoids everybody's eye.*]

EDITH. What is the Dreird?

SARAH. [*Her eyes still cast down.*] It's a necklace—made of turquoise. It's very pretty and very, very old. It belonged to Minnie. It was in her family for centuries, and she gave it to me for a wedding present.

EDITH. Then why not wear that?

SARAH. [*Quietly but stubbornly.*] No.

TOM. Edith's right, my dear. It would just do.

SARAH. No.

TOM. But you used to like it when we were first married?

MINNIE. And she doesn't now. Can't you let the bairn alone?

TOM. [*A little querulous.*] But it does need a touch of blue.

MINNIE. Then you can buy her some sapphires.

TOM. Do you think I'm *made* of money, woman?

MINNIE. It's a puzzle to me *what* you're made of.

EDITH. Why not wear a wreath of blue flowers?

SARAH. [*Throwing off the spell.*] Yes, a wreath, a wreath! Here, look!

[*She plucks a tall stem of larkspur from a specimen vase, and, bending it into a small circle, she pins it at a jaunty Pompadour angle to her soft hair.*]

EDITH. [*Irrelevantly, as she gets up.*] You're a lucky girl.

[*It is almost a sigh.*]

SARAH. I am. And so is Tom.

EDITH. So is Tom. [*She is by the door now.*] I'm going to see Jane.

MINNIE. I'm coming with you.

[*And* TOM *and his wife are alone.*]

SARAH. Tom, you should be very, very nice to Edith.

TOM. Well, I am, aren't I?

SARAH. Yes.

TOM. Why?

SARAH. You see, she's—she's in love with you.

TOM. Rubbish!

SARAH. It's true.

TOM. [*Preening himself, delightedly.*] I don't believe it.

SARAH. Then you're very unobservant.

TOM. Not more than the next man, I flatter myself.

SARAH. Poor Edith.

TOM. There's no "poor Edith" about it. Edith's a very sensible, and in many ways attractive, woman. A woman like that would never be single if she didn't want to be.

SARAH. Maybe. Still, she's in love with you. [*Tempting him.*] You're too modest to see it.

TOM. Oh, I quite realize that she *likes* me. Probably she respects me. But I don't think more than most other women.

SARAH. Then perhaps they're all in love with you, Mr. Moonlight. [*She kisses him.*] Except me.

TOM. [*As she settles on the arm of his chair.*] You? Why, you adore me!

SARAH. I don't.

TOM. Mrs. Moonlight, you worship me.

SARAH. Mr. Moonlight, I don't.

[*But she rubs the back of his hand against her cheek all the same.*]

TOM. Then why, pray, had you the audacity to marry me?

SARAH. Pity, Mr. Moonlight.

TOM. [*Rather cleverly.*] Self-pity, madam, is a disgusting trait.

SARAH. [*Stroking his hair.*] How dare you twist my words, sir! You know quite well that any girl with the name

of Sarah Jones would readily make enormous sacrifices in order to be called Sarah Moonlight.

[*He beams at her.*]

TOM. [*His voice quieter.*] Sarah Moonlight.

SARAH. Yes, blessed?

TOM. [*Humbly.*] *I* love *you.*

SARAH. Dear, dear Mr. Moonlight.

TOM. As much as ever.

SARAH. And after five long years.

TOM. As much as the first time.

SARAH. Do you remember the first time?

TOM. Yes. Do you *know* the first time? [*She nods.*]

SARAH. I was singing.

[*Suddenly she slips from his chair and sits at the piano. While she sings, her eyes smile at him fondly.*]

> Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove,
> Far away, far away would I rove—

[*A light, slight, clear voice, that draws him till he is seated on the music-bench beside her. When the last notes of Mendelssohn's gentle song have died away, and the piano chords still quiver, they remain still and dumb for a moment or two; till suddenly* SARAH, *breaking free of the enchantment, gayly, mischievously strikes the keyboard, and raises her voice to a very different kind of song:*]

Tommy, make room for your uncle,
There's a little dear—

[*And* MR. MOONLIGHT *stifles her gurgling laughter with kisses.*]

SARAH. Unhand me, Mr. Moonlight! What a way for old married people to behave!

[*She moves away from him sedately.*]

TOM. Old married people, indeed! [*She is at the mirror.*] Look at the old married lady in front of you!

SARAH. [*Seriously, with a glance that is almost haunted.*] I look my years.

TOM. You don't. [*She closes her eyes at a sudden stab of pain. What a strange girl it is!*] And for that matter, if I may say so, I don't keep too badly myself in a dry place. Look your years! It's my belief you never will.

SARAH. [*A little wildly.*] Please, Tom! You know that hurts—that hateful subject.

TOM. I'm sorry, dear. I thought you were over that silly fancy.

SARAH. Tom.

TOM. Yes, dear.

SARAH. I'm frightened.

TOM. Frightened? What of?

SARAH. Come and sit by me. [*He sits by her, holding her hand. She is definitely trembling.*] Supposing, Tom, sup-

posing some one should be born who never really did grow any older; I mean, after a certain age. At least, who never looked any older. What would happen?

TOM. She'd probably make a fortune in a freak show.

SARAH. Please be serious, Tom.

TOM. How can I be serious about such nonsense?

SARAH. But just supposing. What do you think would happen?

TOM. Well, in the olden times she'd probably have been burnt as a witch.

SARAH. And what nowadays?

TOM. Nowadays we have other methods of dealing with witches—less crude perhaps, but just as nasty.

SARAH. What would *you* think of such a person?

TOM. Me? I should think she was a freak.

SARAH. It would be horrible to be a freak. One couldn't love a freak, I suppose.

TOM. Not a decent, normal man, I should think.

SARAH. What loneliness!

TOM. My dear, you're trembling. [*Gently.*] Mrs. Moonlight, please don't be morbid. Do you think *you're* a freak just because people still pay you compliments on your looks at the ripe old age of twenty-eight?

SARAH. You hear them talking more than I, Tom. Is it always compliments?

TOM. Well, mostly.

SARAH. Mostly?

TOM. Yes—very often.

SARAH. Edith didn't seem to think so.

TOM. Edith's jealous.

SARAH. No, she's not. She never has been that. I've heard murmurs myself—already—although I am only twenty-eight. They think it's odd. [*Barely above a whisper.*] So do I. I know I looked like this five years ago; and ten years ago. Once upon a time I used to pray above all things that I should never grow older, look older. I think that was wicked, as well as silly. I thought you'd stop loving me if I did. Now I think you'll stop if I don't. [*She has worked herself up almost to a pitch of wildness.*]

TOM. But you will, darling; of course you'll look older in time.

SARAH. You'd rather I did?

TOM. Of course I would. There's quite enough that's miraculous about my wife without that.

SARAH. [*Trying to control herself.*] It sounds foolish when I talk about it to you; but not when I'm alone. Sometimes it's frightened me till I could hardly help screaming. Like a nightmare that's always there. I wake up in the night crying quietly, and I've wanted to wake you. It's at the back of my mind always—always rasping, fretting, scratching at my brain—till sometimes I feel I'm going mad and can't stand it any longer. You see, it's grow-

ing stronger, not weaker; every year for years, ever since Jane was born. [*Hardly above a whisper.*] I don't know what's going to happen. One day it will drive—drive me to—

TOM. [*Comforting her.*] Silly Mrs. Moonlight!

SARAH. Do you think I'm just fanciful?

TOM. Certainly I do. And you always were. It's much too early for *you* to jump to conclusions. Ninon de l'Enclos kept her looks long after twenty-eight. *She* looked young when she was seventy.

SARAH. Poor lady. How tired she must have felt! Tom.

TOM. Yes, dear.

SARAH. You'll always believe, whatever happens, that I love you, won't you?

TOM. Yes, dear; but nothing can or will or shall happen. In fact, I promise you that in the morning you will look a hundred and two. There, will that satisfy you?

[MINNIE *returns.*]

MINNIE. [*To* TOM.] The bairn's asking to see you before she goes out.

TOM. I'll go to her now.

MINNIE. [*To* SARAH.] She's a strange child in many ways, that.

[*Can she never let the poor man alone? He growls at her as a dog might at a cat, and slams the door behind him. And no wonder.*]

SARAH. Minnie. [*She is speaking half to herself.*] I don't know what will become of me.

MINNIE. Of course you don't. Which of us does?

SARAH. I'm never— [*She has difficulty in saying it aloud.*] I'm never going to look any older.

MINNIE. What rubbish is this!

[*But* MINNIE *is not at ease.*]

SARAH. [*Almost a cry.*] It's true. I know it. I know it. I suppose I've really known it for some time.

MINNIE. Ah, away with you!

SARAH. But I didn't think it would matter.

MINNIE. And nor it would.

SARAH. Then you know, too, it's true?

MINNIE. Indeed, I know no such nonsense!

SARAH. [*Meaningly.*] Your necklace, Minnie.

MINNIE. What about my stupid old necklace?

[*This is a nasty moment for* MINNIE.]

SARAH. And the legend?

MINNIE. I tell you I know no legend.

SARAH. One wish to every owner?

MINNIE. Why do you plague your head with that fally-diddle?

SARAH. *I* wished, Minnie. It was just before Jane was

born, and I used to wear your necklace always. [MINNIE *is dabbing at her eyes with a corner of her apron.*] I was afraid that, when Jane was born, I might not be so pretty, and Tom might love me less. So I wished and wished that I might never look any older. [*There is silence for a moment.*] I wished and I wished. That legend, Minnie; it's not fally-diddle, is it?

MINNIE. Don't plague me! How should I know?

SARAH. But you don't think so, do you? [*Miserably, poor* MINNIE *shakes her head.*] I suppose it was wicked of me to wish. Vain and unnatural. Now I—I'm a kind of—freak.

MINNIE. [*Breaking out.*] Don't torment yourself, my darling! It's not true, and, if it is, think how lucky you are! To be your own pretty self always!

SARAH. [*Still following her own train of thought.*] A witch. We have new methods for burning witches. We burn their dear ones too. Minnie.

MINNIE. What is it, angel, what is it?

SARAH. If ever you should get a letter from me—ever, do you hear?

MINNIE. Yes, yes, dear, I hear.

SARAH. Everything in it you must treat as sacred. Not a soul must see it but you. No one else must know what's in it.

MINNIE. And what will be in it?

SARAH. The—the truth. Will you promise?

MINNIE. But why should you start writing me letters? When would you have cause?

SARAH. Probably never—but promise!

MINNIE. Of course I promise; but let's forget all about it.

SARAH. There's just one thing more.

[*But* EDITH *and* TOM *return.*]

TOM. That child adores her father!

MINNIE. [*As if excusing her.*] She's very young.

EDITH. You all spoil her.

SARAH. Do you think she *is* spoiled?

EDITH. No; because the child has character.

SARAH. [*Smiling.*] You'd spoil her worse than any of us!

EDITH. I don't think I have a reputation for indulging myself or any one else. You should be getting ready for church. It's nearly eleven.

TOM. [*To* MINNIE.] And you should be getting Jane ready for her walk instead of fraying all our nerves.

[MINNIE *favors her master with one inexpressive glance, and quietly resumes her knitting.*]

SARAH. You'd better go to her, Minnie.

MINNIE. Do you think he's made her cry?

TOM. Be off, creature!

[*But the creature is off already.*]

EDITH. Come, Sarah. We mustn't be late.

SARAH. I—I don't think I shall come this morning.

EDITH. Sarah!

TOM. My dear, why not?

SARAH. I've got a headache.

EDITH. You were up too late last night.

SARAH. Perhaps that's it.

TOM. [*With dubious eagerness.*] Shall I stay and keep you company?

SARAH. No, thank you, Mr. Moonlight. Never shall it be said that a headache of mine stood between you and your slender chances of salvation.

EDITH. I think that's a little flippant, sister.

SARAH. I'm sorry, Edith dear. Good-by. [*She kisses her.*] Look after each other.

EDITH. Good-by.

SARAH. Good-by, Tom.

[*She puts her face up to his.*]

TOM. Good-by, my dear.

[*He kisses her lightly, and when he withdraws his head, lo! hers remains.*]

SARAH. [*In a little voice.*] I hadn't finished, Mr. Moonlight.

TOM. I'm sorry, my dear. I'm only going to church, you know. [*But this time his kiss is as tender as hers, and as long. She turns and moves quietly towards the door, her face averted.*] Ask Minnie for the salts.

[*She halts at his voice, and answers him only with a gentle nod, her eyes still turned away.*]

EDITH. I think that Minnie shouldn't be allowed to treat you as she does.

TOM. Do you dislike her?

EDITH. Unfortunately, one may disapprove where one doesn't dislike. It's not easy to dislike Minnie. But she doesn't treat you as she should.

TOM. I agree.

EDITH. Then why don't you adopt a strong line about it?

TOM. I do; several times a week.

EDITH. With what result?

TOM. [*Hedging for his pride's sake.*] Well, you can't expect results immediately, you know.

EDITH. Is five years immediately?

TOM. Well, one doesn't want to force the pace. I'm not the man to treat any woman roughly, you know; especially when she's in my employ. There are, after all, certain canons of politeness which one hesitates to transgress.

EDITH. I wonder if all men deceive themselves as much as you do, Thomas.

TOM. I? My dear Edith, you don't know me. If I have one characteristic above others, it is the power to look facts in the face. Besides, Minnie is indispensable to Sarah. After all, Sarah was only three when that woman came to you first as under-nurse, and Minnie was only about fifteen herself. Well, you know, one must make allowances for a long, faithful service like that. [EDITH *is still looking skeptical.*] Besides, these barbaric Scotch people aren't quite like ourselves. They're queer wild folk.

EDITH. I had never thought of Minnie as a wild barbarian before.

TOM. No. Besides, she's very fond of me really.

EDITH. Very much as the canary is fond of its cuttlefish.

TOM. Well, there are all kinds of affection, you know.

EDITH. It may be.

TOM. [*Slyly.*] I'm sure *you* know that as well as any of us.

EDITH. Why I?

TOM. Well, one mustn't conclude that, because a woman remains single, her heart has never been touched.

EDITH. You would conclude instead that her head has been?

TOM. Certainly not. I merely meant—

EDITH. It is time we started.

[*She begins to draw on her gloves; and* TOM *fetches his from the hall, together with his hat and cane.*]

TOM. I merely meant to observe that love knows no boundaries whatever; may, indeed, pay his visits in the most unexpected places.

EDITH. That's the second backhanded compliment you have made me this morning, Thomas.

TOM. [*Appalled.*] My dear Edith, I was generalizing! Really, you mustn't be so sensitive.

EDITH. I'm not in the least sensitive; but, when you're feeling vulgarly curious about me, it would pay you better not to beat about the bush.

TOM. But, Edith—

EDITH. Allow me. In your silly, indirect fashion you were attempting to discover if I have ever been in love. Why not ask me point-blank?

TOM. I wouldn't dream of such an impertinence.

EDITH. Is it *more* impertinent that way? You may ask your question.

TOM. I shall do nothing of the sort.

EDITH. Then I shall answer it. Yes, sir, I have been.

TOM. [*Involuntarily.*] Then why didn't marry him?

EDITH. There were many reasons. He was perhaps, after all, rather a foolish fellow.

TOM. You mean he wasn't worthy of you? Then Sarah was wrong.

[*The words are out before he knows it.*]

EDITH. [*Quickly.*] What was Sarah wrong about?

TOM. [*Clumsily faltering.*] An argument we had. Sarah thought that you'd never married because—er—because you preferred—because no one—because you had never cared for any man sufficiently.

EDITH. Hadn't you both better leave such old maids' gossip to people like me? Put your gloves on, Thomas Moonlight.

TOM. [*Uneasily obeying.*] I'm afraid, Edith, I really have been impertinent. Will you forgive me my clumsiness?

EDITH. May none of us have worse than that to be forgiven, my friend. Let us go. [*He offers her his arm formally. She takes it lightly, but before going adds sternly:*] And, incidentally, it wasn't I who either said or thought he wasn't worthy of me.

TOM. [*Generously making amends.*] No, Edith, it was I.

[*And* EDITH *sniffs again.*]

EDITH. We shall be late.

[*They go. Soon after the sound of the front door closing is heard, the room door is opened silently again and* SARAH *comes back. She is dressed for going out: a coat and skirt, a bonnet, gloves. In her hands are many things, including a small basket box with strap and handle, which she sets down first. The little canvas bag she sets in her reticule, and, of two unstamped letters that she carries, one she arranges prominently on* TOM'S *writing-desk, while the other she holds irresolutely for a second or two. Coming to a decision, she goes to the door and calls.*]

SARAH. Minnie!

[*There is no answer. A moment or two's thought and, changing her mind, she closes the door and leans the second letter against the mantelpiece clock. Then, taking from* TOM'S *desk the letter from her sister, she tears the address off it and shuts it carefully in her bag. But as an afterthought she pockets the letter too. Everything is now ready for the flight. She looks round her dear room for the last time. She does not cry, but her little face is very white and set. One or two pieces of furniture are out of position; she puts them to rights. She smooths out the cushion on* TOM'S *chair. She braces herself a little. She picks up her umbrella and luggage. She goes out steadily, closing the door behind her. We hear the front door again. And that is the end of* SARAH MOONLIGHT.]

ACT TWO

SCENE I

Seventeen years are seventeen years, and now in 1898, this room, no less than its frequenters, looks different. But, unlike its frequenters, the changes it has undergone make it look younger instead of older than if it had not changed at all.

[PERCY MIDDLING, *whom we should judge to be six or seven and twenty, sits before us; solid, stolid, gloomy, patient. His very patience is somehow exasperating. There is no dash about him, no swing, no style. How could he ever hope? As soon as we begin to tire of watching him, in his preoccupation, alternately undo and do up the buttons of his jacket,* MINNIE, *to our relief, joins him.* MINNIE, *it seems, bears the passage of time better than most of us.*]

MINNIE. Jane is coming.

PERCY. [*Without animation.*] She's kept me waiting a long time, hasn't she?

MINNIE. She's been busy, man.

PERCY. [*Without apparent interest.*] What doing?

MINNIE. Reading.

PERCY. Is she near the end of her chapter?

MINNIE. It's not a book with chapters at all.

PERCY. [*Quietly.*] Oh, dear.

MINNIE. It's poetry.

PERCY. [*After a moment's heavy reflection.*] Do you think that means anything?

MINNIE. [*Willfully misunderstanding.*] Well, poetry doesn't, as a rule.

PERCY. [*Slow-witted fellow that he is.*] I have heard that people take to poetry when they are in a certain state of mind.

MINNIE. What state of mind?

PERCY. You know—a funny state of mind.

MINNIE. And why should Jane be in a funny state of mind?

PERCY. [*After thought.*] I suppose, no reason. I was just hoping.

MINNIE. Hoping?

PERCY. After all, it does happen to all of us, including the most unlikely ones. In fact, I don't mind telling you I'm in a very funny state of mind myself.

MINNIE. I'm not blind.

PERCY. No. I suppose not.

MINNIE. I'm sorry for you.

PERCY. I suppose you don't think there's any chance for me, do you?

MINNIE. [*Cheerfully.*] I don't.

PERCY. No. I suppose not.

MINNIE. Still, she *has* been reading a lot of poetry lately.

PERCY. [*Pensively.*] Yes, it's queer, that.

MINNIE. Aye, I don't much like it myself. Well, I can't stop talking here. We're expecting a visitor this afternoon.

PERCY. For tea?

MINNIE. Aye, for tea and a fortnight; and for breakfast, dinner, and supper too. At least, if she behaves herself. [*Before she reaches the door, it opens, and* JANE *is here.*] Ah, you're here. There's that Percy Middling boy still waiting.

[*She leaves them. And* JANE? *Of course, a daughter of* SARAH'S *is very pretty.*]

JANE. Good afternoon, Percy.

[*She is not effusive.*]

PERCY. [*Rising slowly.*] Good afternoon, Jane.

JANE. We don't usually see you in the afternoon. How is it you are not at work?

PERCY. It's Saturday, Jane.

JANE. Of course. And you don't play games. [*Really, her air of disapproval is not encouraging.*] You may sit down.

PERCY. Thank you, Jane. [*He sits down; then adds laboriously:*] As a matter of fact, I came round on a special errand to-day, Jane.

JANE. Errand?

[*He thinks for a moment.*]

PERCY. No, perhaps errand is the wrong word.

JANE. [*Mischievously.*] "Errand" sounds as though your father had sent you.

PERCY. To tell you the truth, I came of my own free will not that father would have objected.

JANE. That is very broad-minded of your father.

[*But poor* PERCY *scents no irony.*]

PERCY. Father, of course, really is in many ways a very excellent man.

JANE. Is that what you came round to say?

PERCY. No; not exactly. [*And then, for he is conscientiously truthful:*] At least, I had intended to say it, lightly during the course of our conversation.

JANE. I see.

PERCY. More particularly, I had meant to speak, if you wouldn't mind, about you; and about me—to a lesser extent, of course.

JANE. [*Kindly.*] I don't think I should, Percy.

PERCY. I don't want to be obstinate, but you can hardly know what I have to say.

JANE. Can't I? All the same, tell me some other time.

PERCY. I would rather now, Jane.

JANE. Besides, mother and father will be back soon. They are out walking.

PERCY. I shall try not to take long.

JANE. And we're expecting a guest.

PERCY. Minnie told me so.

JANE. And such an exciting one. Did she tell you who?

PERCY. No. I don't think so. But what I wanted to say—

JANE. It's a brand-new cousin.

PERCY. You mean, a baby?

JANE. No; she's only a year or two younger than I. Her mother is the black sheep of our family, and they've always lived in Italy.

PERCY. I see. But what I really wanted to say—

JANE. [*Giving no quarter.*] For years the family would have nothing to do with her; then gradually she and mother made it up by letter, and in April we asked if the daughter Joy could come and stay with us. At first they thought that—

PERCY. Jane, I am extremely sorry to interrupt. But if your father is coming back soon, I must say what I have to say quickly.

JANE. Isn't it fit for father to hear?

PERCY. He has heard it already; indeed, several times. Will you listen to me now, Jane?

JANE. Yes, Percy; if you wish.

[*He has long known exactly what he would say, and doggedly he begins at the beginning.*]

PERCY. I dare say you think me a very foolish fellow, Jane.

JANE. I don't remember ever having told you so?

PERCY. No. I suppose not. Yet I guess it. On the other hand, I was not, in fact, below the average at school. Indeed, I ended up in the sixth.

JANE. [*Gently.*] Did you, Percy?

PERCY. That is to say, the lower sixth, not the upper sixth. But if I'd stayed at school long enough, who knows what might not have happened?

JANE. Who, indeed?

PERCY. It is true, of course, that I failed three times to secure a mathematical scholarship at Cambridge. But, once there, I managed by dint of hard work to obtain a decent degree; not a first, of course.

JANE. [*Helping him.*] Still, even a second seems to me wonderful.

PERCY. I got a third. I was never any good at games, but that doesn't mean I'm not a perfectly healthy person. Of course, I've had the usual things—measles, chicken-pox, and whooping-cough—but one can't blame a man for that.

JANE. Indeed not.

PERCY. Then as to my present position. Engineering is quite a respectable occupation, I think you would agree.

JANE. *I* have nothing particular against engineers.

PERCY. And the firm, it is only fair to say, is a universally respected, well-established, and old one; so old, indeed, that many good judges consider it has seen its best days. I shouldn't go so far as that myself. Furthermore, my father, who, as I said, is really a very excellent man, would be regarded by many people as being, so to speak, in a very comfortable position. I should perhaps add that father and I have always been on the very best of terms. Before saying any more—

JANE. Percy.

PERCY. Yes, Jane?

JANE. Are you trying to say you want me to marry you?

PERCY. I was coming to that a little later.

JANE. Have you prepared all this?

PERCY. Well, I had thought it all over carefully—except the bit about marrying me. I thought I'd leave that bit to the passion of the moment.

JANE. May I advise you, Percy—for the next time?

PERCY. For the next time? Have I got to do this often?

JANE. Next time you want a girl to marry you, just say, "Jane, I love you"; unless, of course, her name is Mary.

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PERCY. [*After a long pause.*] Is it—is it no good, then?

JANE. I'm afraid not, Percy.

PERCY. Because of the way I set about it?

JANE. No, not because of that. You see, I don't love you.

PERCY. You mustn't think, Jane, because I didn't say so that *I* don't love *you*. I do, and I always shall; always, Jane. I thought perhaps you already knew that.

JANE. So I did. I hoped you'd learn not to. Are you very disappointed?

PERCY. [*After reflection.*] No. You see, women often change their minds, and I shall ask you again later from time to time.

JANE. Poor Percy, do you think that will really make a difference?

[*He reflects again.*]

PERCY. No. I suppose not. [*He lifts up his head.*] I thought I heard the front door.

JANE. I think you did. I expect they've come back.

PERCY. I believe I'd rather not wait. [*He ponders on this a moment as at a strange discovery.*] Good-by, Jane.

[*He offers his hand.*]

JANE. [*Shaking it.*] Good-by, Percy. And thank you ever so much.

[*When he is gone, we can hear the sound of voices outside,*

nale voices raised in greeting. Then, when it has subsided, VILLIE RAGG *comes in. Now, except in respect of age,* VILLIE RAGG *is clearly a very different young man; deb-nair, light-hearted, quick-witted, dashing, and man-of-he-world. That much* JANE *is quite old enough to appre-iate. Marking her eye, we are not slow to perceive, nor ndeed to share, her opinion. Closing the door behind him, he amusing fellow strikes a histrionic attitude and de-laims.*]

VILLIE. Willie is back!

ANE. Oh, Willie!

VILLIE. Willie left his little Jane,
But Willie soon came back again!

ANE. Oh, Willie!

VILLIE. I made that up on my way from the station. I aid to my cabby, "Cabby, what rimes with Jane?" And e said, "Pain." So I left him and took another cab. [*Sud-lenly sober.*] Jane, you haven't kissed me!

ANE. You haven't asked me.

VILLIE. [*The Lothario.*] Most girls wouldn't wait to be sked.

ANE. Then I'm not like most girls.

VILLIE. None of them are.

ANE. [*A finger raised in mock warning.*] Now, don't you tart throwing your triumphs in my face again, Willie Ragg. Remember, last time you made me cry.

WILLIE. Shall a fellow ever forget? It was the proudest moment of my life.

JANE. Well, it won't be repeated.

WILLIE. [*Holding out his hand deferentially.*] Please, Miss Moonlight, may I kiss you?

JANE. Yes, you may; twice. [*And so they kiss—twice.*] Dear Willie. Where have you been?

WILLIE. I've been to Newmarket inspecting my horse.

JANE. What horse?

WILLIE. This afternoon I bought a racehorse; at least a quarter share in one. Georgie Greenaway has a half share and Arthur the other quarter. To-day I went down to choose my quarter. Aren't you pleased?

JANE. [*Not very eager.*] Of course I am; but, Willie dear, you know you can't afford it.

WILLIE. [*Laying a finger along his nose.*] I can.

JANE. [*Very eager.*] Have you got that job?

WILLIE. No, but I probably shall. I've got better than a job; I've got the spondulicks, the real yellow ready itself.

JANE. But how?

WILLIE. Charm of manner.

JANE. A gift?

WILLIE. Not exactly; more a loan.

JANE. Oh, Willie!

[*Her face falls.*]

WILLIE. That's nothing to worry about, my dear.

JANE. But I *am* worried. Somebody's asked me to marry them.

WILLIE. Them?

JANE. Him.

WILLIE. What did you say?

JANE. I refused, of course.

WILLIE. Well, that's all right, isn't it? Unless, of course, you wanted to.

JANE. You know I didn't want to. You know I don't want to marry any one but you.

WILLIE. Was it that Percy Middling?

JANE. Yes. [*No man with a sense of humor could help laughing aloud, and* WILLIE RAGG *certainly has a sense of humor.*] It's no good laughing. Mother will be very upset; so will father.

WILLIE. [*Still amused.*] But do they like him?

JANE. They think he's a good match. And they think you're a very bad one.

WILLIE. And so I am. But, after all, you're old enough to know your mind, and we're living on the edge of the twentieth century.

JANE. That's what I said.

WILLIE. What did they answer to that?

JANE. Mother said that she saw insufficient evidence at present to show that in the twentieth century people could be nourished without food.

WILLIE. Utter nonsense!

JANE. She also said something about a reasonably good character.

WILLIE. Well, that was decent of her, anyhow.

JANE. And regretted that you hadn't one.

WILLIE. I hate to say anything against your people, Jane, but they can never forget that a fellow has had the bad luck to lose two or three jobs—

JANE. Three or four.

WILLIE. Well, three or four; and, above all, was sacked from Harrow.

JANE. They certainly don't much care for the last part.

WILLIE. I can't understand that point of view.

JANE. I often tell them what you say—that no self-respecting boy of average spirit could decently *omit* to be sacked from Harrow. But mother only sniffs.

WILLIE. Anyway, I'm going to marry you just the same. Nothing shall stop us.

JANE. I don't think anything can. We love each other so much.

WILLIE. And we'll announce it to your people to-night.

JANE. [*Seriously.*] There's just one thing.

WILLIE. [*Pulled up.*] What's that?

JANE. I've been meaning to tell you for some days. You ought to know. There's—there's suicide in our family; at least, one suicide—my mother.

WILLIE. Your mother?

JANE. Yes, father's first wife was my real mother; and she didn't die naturally. They told me when I was twenty-one.

WILLIE. I'd never heard. Why did she do it?

JANE. Nobody knows. She just slipped away one morning, and left a letter for father saying she was going to do it, but it was no use looking for her. She didn't say why or anything.

WILLIE. But what did they think was at the bottom of it?

JANE. I've never been told very much about it. I think she had some kind of obsession, something about her looks, that preyed on her mind. She'd been a little hysterical that morning.

WILLIE. Was her—was she never found?

JANE. No. Of course, they did everything they could to find her, but they couldn't. They even asked her sister in Italy—that was how the reconciliation began—but she

could tell us nothing. It—it doesn't make any difference, does it?

[*The sound of that front door again.*]

WILLIE. [*Kissing her.*] You shall see if it does. Wait.

[*When they have waited a moment or two,* TOM *and* EDITH *come in. Certainly* TOM *doesn't look his sixty-one years, or, if he does, it's a handsome sixty-one, with its touch of white about the hair: and* EDITH, *a little plumper and softer, is at fifty-five perhaps all the better for her extra years. They halt a little at the sight of* WILLIE; WILLIE *erect and appropriately, defiantly arranged behind* JANE'S *chair. Their greeting is not effusive.*]

TOM. Oh, I thought you were alone, Jane.

WILLIE. Good afternoon, Mrs. Moonlight.

EDITH. Good afternoon.

WILLIE. Good afternoon, sir.

TOM. How do you do?

WILLIE. I should like, if you will allow me, sir, to have a word with you.

TOM. Alone?

JANE. No, I shall stay, Willie.

EDITH. Does it concern Jane?

WILLIE. Very closely, ma'am.

EDITH. I shall stay, Tom.

TOM. As you please, my dear.

WILLIE. [*A little abashed.*] Well—although a fellow doesn't want to risk being discourteous—

EDITH. Don't risk it, young man.

WILLIE. Very well. I wish to ask formally your permission to my marriage with your daughter.

EDITH. *Do* you?

TOM. Have you asked Jane?

WILLIE. I have. And she was good enough to consent.

EDITH. The girl's lost her senses.

WILLIE. Am I to understand from that that you regard the match without enthusiasm?

EDITH. I regard it as a bad joke.

JANE. Mother!

WILLIE. Do you share that view, sir?

TOM. [*More gently.*] Well, my friend, Mrs. Moonlight may perhaps express herself with undue emphasis, but my own view is substantially the same. I don't want to be intolerant, but we must be practical. Have you any money?

WILLIE. I will be quite frank with you. No; at the moment I have not.

EDITH. At what moment precisely are you likely to have some?

WILLIE. That is not a question one can answer very exactly. But I suppose I have prospects no less than the next man.

EDITH. What are they?

WILLIE. Well, they are a little difficult to define; though only to-day I acquired a share in—er—

EDITH. Yes?

WILLIE. In—er—a very promising racehorse.

EDITH. I see. And, of course, you might always win the Calcutta Sweep.

JANE. Willie means to get a job.

EDITH. Does any one mean to give him one?

TOM. We mustn't be too hard, my dear. It isn't necessary, provided these two young people clearly understand that a marriage between them is quite impossible.

WILLIE. Am I to gather then, sir, that you definitely refuse your consent?

TOM. I'm afraid, quite definitely.

EDITH. Are you surprised?

WILLIE. Again at the risk of seeming discourteous, not in the least.

TOM. [*Puffing relief.*] Good. Then the interview is over. You will stay to tea? We are expecting a visitor.

WILLIE. Thank you, sir. I should be glad to stay to tea, but the interview, I'm afraid, is not quite over. I must point out that, though I regret your disapproval exceedingly, I

feel it would not be right to let that stand in the way of our happiness. You agree, Jane?

JANE. Yes, Willie.

WILLIE. We regard our engagement, therefore, as still valid.

TOM. The devil you do! You listen to me, young man—

EDITH. Tom, let us be quite calm. Jane, my dear, I'm sorry you should have acquired this unworthy infatuation, but I will do all I can to help you get over it.

JANE. It's no good, mother. We regard ourselves as engaged.

EDITH. You may regard yourselves as you wish. But nothing can come of it.

TOM. Nothing *shall* come of it. I will trouble you, sir, not to visit this house in the future.

EDITH. My advice, Tom, is to encourage his visits, not to prevent them. I think you will find that more effective.

JANE. Mother, how could you be so unkind!

EDITH. Would you prefer that he did not come?

JANE. No, but—

WILLIE. Without complaining of the very shabby treatment—

TOM. Shabby treatment be damned! If I had my way—

[*But the door opens, and* MINNIE *is there.*]

MINNIE [*In a strange low voice.*] Your visitor is here.

[*They all rise, and for a moment or two wait in silence. When* JOY *eventually comes in, those of us who have seen* SARAH MOONLIGHT *cannot avoid a shiver at the resemblance. There she stands shyly—almost, one might think, a little stunned. If one did not know there was no reason for it, one might almost imagine, from that slight swaying, that she is about to faint. Eventually* EDITH *breaks the silence.*]

EDITH. How are you, my dear?

[*She kisses her.*]

JOY. Very well, thank you.

[*It is almost as if she were in a trance.*]

TOM. [*Bracing himself at length, and shaking hands.*] I'm very glad to see you.

[*But somehow the strange girl can't answer him.*]

EDITH. This is my daughter, Jane.

JANE. [*Warmly.*] I've been so looking forward to your coming.

[*She too shakes an unresponsive hand. Yet the visitor still is dumb.*]

EDITH. And this is Mr. William Ragg. My niece, Joy.

WILLIE. [*Beaming his admiration.*] Delighted, I'm sure.

[*And him she doesn't even see. For she cannot move her strange, disquieting glance from* JANE.]

EDITH. [*Making another effort towards normality.*] Well now, my dear, what about tea? Tea, I think, Minnie.

[*As though her legs were too weak for their weight,* JOY, *feeling for the chair behind her, slowly sits. And then the curtain falls.*]

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

[*On her accustomed perch, three weeks later,* MINNIE *is still knitting, when* JOY *joins her.*]

JOY. You've packed everything, Minnie?

MINNIE. Of course I have. Doesn't your train go at 3.20?

JOY. Yes. My horrid train.

MINNIE. There now; you'll enjoy yourself again.

JOY. Yes. It's funny; we can always do that. No hurt hurts always. But what a sweet three weeks to leave behind!

MINNIE. You'll come again.

JOY. After another twenty years?

MINNIE. Away with you! Long before.

JOY. I'm not sure. What's the use?

MINNIE. To see us all.

JOY. To see you all growing old without me? To feel—left behind?

MINNIE. There's no leaving behind. You're older in yourself, too.

JOY. Yes, in myself. That's one of my little troubles. People make love to me, Minnie. They've been doing it now for thirty years; and in just the same way. I can hardly listen politely.

MINNIE. If that's your only trouble, you're a lucky girl.

JOY. Indeed, I would be. There are other things, though. My disappearances, for instance. I've had to disappear twice since I left you. People begin to wonder after a few years; so, like poor Joe, I have to keep—moving on. Seven years in Florence I was; then eight years in Paris. Now I'm in Vienna.

MINNIE. [*Not allowing herself to condole.*] Some of us would like the change.

JOY. That kind of change is not much help. *I* don't change; my work doesn't change. Once I used to love playing. Now a piano merely means something to make a little money with.

MINNIE. Only a little?

JOY. No, quite a lot; counting pupils.

MINNIE. Who's this new music-master you're off to meet in Paris?

JOY. It isn't a music-master at all really. It's a man who is going to arrange some concerts for me.

MINNIE. You oughtn't to have to work.

JOY. I'm glad I do. What else should I think about?

MINNIE. [*Breaking out.*] Oh, why did you ever go? Why did you?

JOY. I told you in my letter.

MINNIE. I know, but you *needn't* have gone. I still don't understand.

JOY. *I* understand. For years I'd had this fear, this growing fear, day and night. It hardly ever left me, and it got worse and worse. Then suddenly that morning I couldn't bear it any longer. I felt ill, sick with fear, horror at my own freakishness. I only wanted to get away—anywhere—to hide, so that no one should suffer through me, to get away before the world found me out for what I was: a freak. If you like, it was madness, hysteria, panic. I suppose it was. But look at me now. [MINNIE *looks.*] Can you say it was a delusion? Do I look as old as my own daughter?

MINNIE. No.

JOY. Then can you say I was wrong? [MINNIE *shakes her head.*] There; let's talk no more about it.

MINNIE. Have you lots of friends?

JOY. Yes; temporary friends. Every now and again I go and pay Maud a secret visit in Florence. They know all about it and are kind to me. Joy's a nice girl, but delicate. Of course, she's not like Jane.

MINNIE. So you're pleased with your Jane?

JOY. Oh, Minnie dear!

MINNIE. Well?

JOY. *So* pleased, *so* pleased. I've dreamed about her so much, especially since she was grown up. I wanted to see her more than anything else in the world; so, when the chance came, I just couldn't keep away any longer. Minnie, tell me truly: do you think she likes me?

MINNIE. She adores you. I'd box her ears if she didn't.

JOY. Darling Minnie! I wish I could take you with me.

MINNIE. No, I must stay and look after them here. That Tom Moonlight, for instance, would be in a pretty way without me.

JOY. [*Half to herself.*] That Tom Moonlight.

[*She covers her eyes with a hand. And then* JANE *comes in.*]

JANE. Oh, Joy, I've been looking for you.

JOY. I haven't been far.

JANE. I want to speak to you about something very important before you go.

JOY. What is it? Come and sit down.

JANE. It's rather private. Minnie dear, will you leave us alone? [MINNIE *collects her chattels.*] Keep a look-out for Percy, and tell me when he's here. He's coming round to say good-by to Joy.

MINNIE. I will.

[*She goes.*]

JOY. [*Making room for* JANE *beside her.*] Now, what is it?

JANE. Well, it's about Willie. I want you to help me.

JOY. My dear, how can I help you?

JANE. Talk to father.

JOY. You think he'd listen to any stray niece who walks in with a pocketful of advice?

JANE. But he's mad about you. Can't you see that? He talks about you night and day. I can't understand it.

JOY. That's not very polite.

JANE. Oh, you know I like you awfully too. I simply hate your going. I wish you could stay with us always.

JOY. I know you do.

JANE. But father—I've never seen him like this. And mother too. He says you remind him of my real mother; you know, his first wife.

JOY. Yes.

[*She turns her eyes away.*]

JANE. That's why I think he might take some notice of you. Couldn't you, before you go, just tell him what you think of Willie?

JOY. Are you sure you'd like me to?

JANE. Yes: why not?

JOY. Because, you see, what I think of Willie is really very much what Uncle Tom thinks of Willie.

JANE. Joy!

JOY. I'm so sorry. But you'd rather I told the truth?

JANE. Yes, but can't you see what Willie really is?

JOY. I'm afraid I can, my dear. I've been worried that you can't. Now, Percy Middling—

JANE. [*Contemptuously.*] Percy!

JOY. Percy has some very solid qualities.

JANE. So solid that it's quite painful to come into contact with them.

JOY. He'd make a good husband.

JANE. Then I shall be unselfish. He can make one for some one else. Really, Joy, I thought you at least would be on my side.

JOY. My dear, I *am* on your side.

JANE. That's what mother says. But middle-aged people have really forgotten what love is.

JOY. Not always, Jane. I've not forgotten.

JANE. You're not old enough to have forgotten yet. But perhaps you've never known.

JOY. You're very disappointed in me?

JANE. No, not very. I thought you'd understand; that's all.

[*But when* WILLIE RAGG *comes in at this moment, it is quite clear that they are disappointed, both of them.*]

WILLIE. Ladies, your servant.

JANE. Oh, Willie, I'm so glad you've come.

[*Is it only to our imagination that his kiss is more perfunctory than hers?*]

WILLIE. [*A shade proprietary.*] My nice Jenny.

JOY. Good afternoon, Mr. Ragg. You're only just in time to see me. I'm off in half an hour, you know.

WILLIE. I knew. That's why I came. And to see my Jenny, of course. When are you coming back to us? Make it soon.

JOY. [*Really almost arch, she is.*] Don't you dare to be polite to me, Mr. Ragg. You've got your Jenny and you wouldn't even notice if you never saw me again.

WILLIE. On the contrary, I have almost come to regard you, during these last three weeks, as an essential corner of a very happy triangle.

JANE. [*With good-natured irony.*] Indeed, I don't know what our engagement would have been without you.

JOY. Three is not usually regarded as the ideal number for an engagement.

JANE. [*Unable to help it.*] But, to the best of my knowledge, Willie has never been engaged to more than one of us.

JOY. [*With a glance at* WILLIE.] I have never forgotten it.

WILLIE. And why should you? After all, I can only be one of countless admirers.

JANE. [*Her good humor restored.*] Willie, you carry politeness to a pitch that would terrify the most trusting fiancée. No wonder every woman loves you.

WILLIE. My dear, if politeness were the only reason for my success, I couldn't begin to compete against, say, an efficient head waiter.

JOY. Have you ever had to?

[*But* WILLIE *is not so easily trapped.*]

WILLIE. [*To* JANE.] M'lud, must I answer that question?

JOY. Certainly.

WILLIE. Then the case should be heard *in camera.*

JANE. The case shall be dismissed; the judge is bored with it.

WILLIE. What a very good reason! And brand new.

JANE. The next case up for hearing is about Monday's tickets. Have you got them?

WILLIE. What tickets, darling?

JANE. Oh, Willie, your memory! Aren't you going to take mother and me to the horse-show? Or have you changed your mind?

WILLIE. Oh, that? No, of course, I remember. Yes, I wrote for tickets. They're probably waiting for me at home.

JANE. Mother wanted to know. [*To* JOY.] I wish you could have come too.

JOY. I shall be in Paris, very sorry for myself.

JANE. I'd love to go to Paris.

JOY. It's a lonely city.

WILLIE. But you won't be alone?

JOY. No, Mr. Ragg. I'm afraid I have some friends there. I'm staying with them.

JANE. Afraid? Nasty friends?

JOY. Fairly nasty.

[MINNIE *opens the door.*]

MINNIE. [*Her eye falling on* WILLIE.] Oh, *you're* here. [*To* JANE.] That lad's come—that Percy Middling.

JANE. Where is he?

MINNIE. He's got your father and mother cornered in the study again.

JANE. [*Spurred to action.*] Oh, dear, how long has he been here? What's he talking about?

MINNIE. What does he usually talk about?

JANE. Willie, excuse me.

[*And, followed by* MINNIE, *she hurries away.*]

JOY. Mr. Middling is persistent.

WILLIE. May I sit beside you?

JOY. Certainly—why?

WILLIE. Why does a fellow ever want to sit beside a pretty woman?

JOY. I've never thought the problem out, Mr. Ragg.

WILLIE. Let's think it out together. In the first place, we'll never solve it if you persist in calling me Mr. Ragg.

JOY. How do you know I want to solve it, Mr. Ragg?

WILLIE. Until you call me Willie, I shall know that you *don't* want to; are, in fact, afraid to.

JOY. I'm never afraid—Willie.

WILLIE. Then in that case I need not be afraid of solving this problem for you.

[*He moves nearer, his arm resting along the back of the couch behind her; but she does not retreat.*]

JOY. During the judge's temporary absence on private business, the prisoner proceeds to flirt with his prosecuting counsel.

WILLIE. If counsel always looked like you, the dock would be the most popular spot in London.

JOY. As polite as ever, O ideal prisoner.

WILLIE. Involuntary, Joy. My prosecuting counsel has such a very pretty nose.

[*And then, before ever we or she know it has happened, he is kissing her.*]

JOY. [*Unflustered.*] Why did you do that?

WILLIE. I don't know, but it was worth it. Are you very angry?

JOY. No; at least, I don't know yet. Have you forgotten Jane?

WILLIE. No, of course, I haven't forgotten Jane. I adore Jane. You don't meet people like my Jenny every day. Jane's an angel. Jane—

JOY. I think I'm a little confused.

WILLIE. Well, what I mean is, one doesn't meet people like you every day either. The fact is—er—you're an angel too.

JOY. I see. And whenever you meet an angel, you must treat her accordingly?

WILLIE. Exactly.

JOY. You'll have a busy time in heaven, won't you?

WILLIE. Now, don't make fun of a fellow. I thought you were the kind to understand.

JOY. I think I do understand. I merely wanted to make sure of where you stand with Jane. Stands Willie where he did?

WILLIE. [*Airily.*] Yes, roughly—yes. You see, already I've come to regard Jane almost exactly as my wife.

JOY. [*With polite interest.*] So you have a wife, too?

WILLIE. No, of course not. But I mean Jane soon will be.

JOY. And that seems to you a good and sufficient reason for kissing me?

WILLIE. Well, hang it all, she's not my wife *yet*. And a fellow's not a bally monk.

JOY. Now I come to think of it, I don't believe a fellow is.

WILLIE. If there's one thing I dislike, it is sarcasm. I'd much rather you flared up and boxed my ears. I'd know where I was then.

JOY. [*More gently.*] Not if *I* boxed them.

WILLIE. Well, I wish you had. As I say, I thought you'd understand. But, as you disliked it, I can only say I'm sorry.

JOY. [*Surprisingly.*] I didn't say I disliked it.

[*In a flash his expression of offended, sulky dignity vanishes.*]

WILLIE. [*Quietly, eagerly.*] What does that mean?

JOY. It doesn't mean that you may sit beside me again.

WILLIE. But, Joy, *did* you dislike it?

JOY. [*Shaking her head prettily.*] Not very much.

WILLIE. [*Exploding.*] Oh, and to think that you're going abroad for good in half an hour!

JOY. But Jane?

WILLIE. Jane's different. My love for her is more settled—quite different. I wouldn't hurt her or lose her for anything, but nor could I resist you, Joy. A fellow's not putting it very well, but if you could be, so to speak, the last memory of my bachelordom, I could get married without any regrets.

JOY. [*Unable to resist it.*] Oh, Willie, you do say the most beautiful things to me! Still, there it is: I'm off in half an hour.

WILLIE. [*Suddenly.*] I shall follow you.

JOY. You'll miss me. Paris is a large place.

WILLIE. I should find you, even without an address.

JOY. Then I needn't give you one.

WILLIE. You needn't. But it would save trouble. Will you?

JOY. I don't know.

WILLIE. We could have such fun there. A fellow loves Paris. Now, *numero* what?

JOY. Numero—quatre-vingt-deux.

WILLIE. And the rest?

JOY. Mind, I don't promise to see you.

WILLIE. You needn't promise. I'd much rather you saw me than promised to. Quatre-vingt-deux?

JOY. Rue—rue d'Algers. My friends called—Picard.

WILLIE. Quatre-vingt-duex, rue d'Algers; chez Mme Picard. That's jolly. Now listen. You're leaving by the 3.20. I shan't be able to follow before—well—

[*But further plans are interrupted by the return of* JANE *with* PERCY.]

JANE. Percy's come to say good-by.

WILLIE. [*With patronizing heartiness.*] That's right. Shake hands with the lady, Percy.

PERCY. I was going to.

[*He does so.*]

JOY. It was so kind of you to come round.

PERCY. Well, I don't live far away, you know.

JOY. Still, there must be heaps of more amusing ways of spending an afternoon.

PERCY. Not for me, I assure you. You see, the office is closed on Saturday.

WILLIE. In fact, you didn't know what in the world to do with yourself.

PERCY. [*Reflectively.*] No, I suppose not.

JANE. Willie, you're not to tease.

WILLIE. I, my dear? I shouldn't dare. Oh, Jenny, I've got to make a confession.

JANE. What is it?

WILLIE. I won't be able to take you and your mother to the horse-show after all.

JANE. Oh, Willie!

WILLIE. I'm devilish sorry, but I've got to leave London, and probably won't be back. I forgot all about it.

JANE. But *must* you leave London?

WILLIE. I can't get out of it. You see, it's business.

JANE. But you haven't any business.

WILLIE. [*Hurt.*] Jane, please.

JANE. Well, you don't call a quarter of a horse business?

WILLIE. I sincerely trust it will be very good business. I've got to see about entering him for a race, and it will be too late if I leave it.

JANE. Why can't Georgie Greenaway do it?

WILLIE. Georgie's ill, and Arthur's quite incapable.

JANE. Oh, but, Willie, I was so looking forward to it.

WILLIE. My dear, I'm much more disappointed than you. Anyway, I'll send you the tickets, and perhaps your father will use mine. Say I'm forgiven.

JANE. Of course you are.

[*She presses his hand warmly.*]

WILLIE. My nice Jenny. Well, I must go and see about it. Good-by, Joy. Best of luck and *bon voyage.*

JOY. Good-by. And *bon voyage* to you too. [*To* JANE *innocently.*] Isn't it funny? Mr. Ragg has to go to Paris too.

[*And the color drains from poor* JANE'S *face.*]

JANE. Paris? Willie, for business?

WILLIE. [*Not quite at ease.*] Yes, my dear. After all, people *do* do business in Paris.

JANE. But you said it was your racehorse?

WILLIE. I know. It's to do with Longchamp. Our trainer thought it might do some good there.

JANE. [*Mistress of herself by now.*] I see.

WILLIE. That's right. Now, what would you like me to bring you back as a surprise?

JANE. Nothing, Willie. I don't think I like surprises.

WILLIE. Well, we'll see. Good-by, Percy.

PERCY. Good-by.

WILLIE. Good-by, Jenny. [*He goes to kiss her, and quietly she submits to his embrace.*]

Willie must leave his little Jane,
But Willie will soon be back again.

Good-by, everybody. Good-by. Good-by.

[*He is gone. There is a long, oppressive silence.* PERCY *eventually attempts to restore the atmosphere to normal.*]

PERCY. I have heard that when the weather is bad in London it is often quite good in the Channel.

[*But his information is unheeded, while* JOY'S *eyes follow* JANE *solicitously as she moves, fidgeting, about the room.*]

JOY. [*At length, and how her voice yearns.*] Jane. [*But* JANE *is preoccupied.*] Jane, come and sit here.

JANE. [*Carelessly.*] No. [*Then her mind is made up.*] Percy, will you do something for me?

PERCY. Of course I will, Jane.

JANE. You know where Willie's rooms are?

PERCY. Yes, Jane.

JANE. Then will you give him this?

[*"This" is something she has been tugging off the third finger of her left hand.*]

PERCY. Yes, Jane. Why?

[*And now* JANE *makes her big effort.*]

JANE. Percy, do you—do you still want to marry me?

PERCY. Why, of course, Jane.

JANE. Then you may ask Willie to congratulate you.

PERCY. [*After a long moment of incomprehension.*] But Jane, I don't understand. Do you mean—

JANE. [*Her voice on a strange, strained note.*] Never mind. Don't try to understand now. Just go and do what I ask.

PERCY. But, Jane—

JANE. [*Almost frantic.*] Oh, do go—please go!

PERCY. Very well, Jane.

[*And he goes. As soon as the door closes* JANE'S *self-control gives way and she sobs bitterly. For a second or two* JOY *hesitates to comfort her, mistrusting the attempt. But she cannot restrain herself for long. Her arms about her, she pours out the soothing sounds and words of a mother to a hurt child.*]

JOY. There, there, my darling. Don't fret; don't you fret. You must be brave. He's not worth it.

[*But* JANE *tears herself away.*]

JANE. Don't touch me! How dare you? He's not worth

it, is he? But you wanted him, didn't you—worth it or not! And I was too big a fool to see it.

JOY. Jane—

JANE. Don't talk to me. I hate you. Do you hear? I hate you.

[TOM MOONLIGHT *and* EDITH, *as they open the door, stand amazed at this outburst, and glance inquiringly at* JOY.]

EDITH. Jane, what are you saying?

JANE. [*Turning on them.*] Why does she want to come here to spoil my life?

TOM. [*In mild protest.*] Jane, dear, what do you mean?

JANE. I mean that I've just broken off my engagement and I'm going to marry Percy. Now are you all satisfied? I shall be unhappy all my life. She wanted Willie, and she's got him. She's going to Paris with him like a common—a— [*But the tears well up again, and she buries her face, sobbing, on* EDITH'S *shoulder.*] I shall be unhappy all my life. I shall be unhappy all my life.

EDITH. No, dear, you won't. It will be all right soon, quite all right. Joy doesn't want your Willie Ragg. You've made some mistake.

JANE. [*Through her sobs.*] No, I haven't—I haven't. Take me away from her, please.

EDITH. Of course, darling. You shall lie down and have a nice rest. A nice rest. A nice rest.

[*And, crooning, she leads her away. A silence follows.*]

JOY. [*As though emerging by an effort from a stupor.*] I must be careful not to miss my train.

TOM. You're not late. Aunt Edith and I are coming to the station with you; and I told them to whistle for a cab at three o'clock.

[*She seems not to hear.*]

JOY. [*Recalling herself.*] I beg your pardon?

TOM. I say I told them to whistle for a cab at three o'clock.

JOY. Are you disgusted with me—Uncle Tom?

TOM. My child, I don't even know the facts.

JOY. Jane told you fairly. I've stolen her young man.

TOM. But—but why did she think you were going to Paris with him?

JOY. I wanted her to think so.

TOM. *Wanted* her to?

JOY. So that she should give him up.

TOM. [*With the first hint of harshness in his voice.*] And the field be clear for you?

JOY. [*A little listless.*] I didn't want him. I'd rather have Jane's love than his.

TOM. Then why?

JOY. You were against the marriage?

TOM. Yes; certainly *I* was. I thought they would never be happy.

JOY. So did I.

TOM. But really, my dear, I'm her father.

JOY. Yes, Uncle Tom.

TOM. And this talk about Paris?

JOY. Mr. Ragg wanted to follow me and meet me there. I didn't forbid him.

TOM. Joy!

JOY. I wouldn't have met him. I gave him the wrong address—a made-up one. I wanted Jane to see what he was really like.

TOM. But, my dear, why should you go to all this elaborate trouble for us?

JOY. [*Her voice a little tired.*] Don't ask me any more questions, please, Uncle Tom.

TOM. Very well, my dear.

JOY. When Jane has got over this, will you tell her what I've told you?

TOM. Of course I will.

JOY. Promise?

TOM. Promise.

JOY. Uncle Tom, are you very happy?

TOM. Very, my dear. Why?

JOY. I knew you were really. I just wanted to hear you say so.

TOM. [*Meaning it.*] What a strange, strange girl it is.

[*The small voice of a small clock strikes three.*]

JOY. I don't want to go back. Oh, I don't want to go back.

TOM. I don't want you to. Your mother must let you come back again.

JOY. [*Meaninglessly.*] Yes.

TOM. Hadn't you better put your hat and coat on? That was three.

JOY. Yes, Uncle Tom.

[*She stares at him for a moment; then, going to him, gently, gravely winds her arms about his neck while his forehead puckers at the unexpectedness of her fond, sad kisses. Bewildered slightly, he none the less pats her shoulders with avuncular encouragement; until, forgetting their relationships, he kisses and caresses her very much as he might have done the first* MRS. MOONLIGHT. *Then we hear that shrill cab-whistle being blown outside; and* JOY *hears it too, and clutches her* UNCLE TOM *all the tighter.*

ACT THREE

[*October 3rd, 1928. Thirty years have brought electric light, central heating, a vogue for colored distemper, and much else that has transformed this old room. But flesh and blood still remains impervious to all attempts at rejuvenation.* MINNIE, *though she must be eighty-six, still sits knitting on her accustomed perch, and we politely try not to notice that her feet are still farther from the ground, since she has definitely shrunk a little. We perceive that* JANE, *who is writing letters at her father's old desk, has grown into a jolly, rather fashionable, middle-aged woman. About* PERCY *we can form no conclusions, save that he is presumably nearing sixty, for he is almost hidden by his evening paper. We gather that dinner has not long been finished. As nine o'clock strikes,* PERCY *sets aside his "Evening Standard."*]

PERCY. Ragg ought to be here soon.

MINNIE. [*Grunting.*] The good-for-nothing! What do you think he wants?

PERCY. I was busy at the office when he rang me up, and couldn't wait to ask.

MINNIE. He's up to no good, I'll be bound.

PERCY. [*Who has not lost his habit of thinking before he speaks.*] No. I suppose not.

JANE. I wish you hadn't asked him round, darling.

PERCY. He asked himself. Besides, I like him. So do you.

JANE. I know. It's only laziness. I can't be bothered to get out my party face.

PERCY. [*Resuming his paper.*] It seems to me, if your present face is good enough for your husband, it ought to be good enough for him.

JANE. It's *too* good for him. My party face is only my second-best. I reserve my best for you. [*But* PERCY, *who is reading again, and can't do two things at once, fails to respond.*] Darling, are you cross?

PERCY. [*In absent-minded interrogation.*] Mm?

JANE. Are you cross, angel?

[*She goes and fondles a strand of his thinning hair.*]

PERCY. No, of course I'm not cross. I hope I'm never cross.

MINNIE. [*As she knits.*] You may hope!

PERCY. [*Mildly.*] But, please, dear, don't ruffle my hair before Ragg comes. His hair is always so very tidy.

JANE. Oh, dear, I wish I could stop loving you.

PERCY. My dear, I don't know *what* you're talking about.

JANE. You once swore that *you'd* love *me* always.

PERCY. I know. And a promise is a promise. I've never broken my word yet. What do you want me to do?

JANE. Nothing at all but what you do do. Just continue to be your own sweet, slow-witted, idiotic, adorable self.

MINNIE. He'll do that all right.

JANE. And you mustn't be puzzled if once every twelve months your middle-aged but rather attractive wife allows herself the luxury of telling you she loves you.

MINNIE. How can he help but be puzzled?

JANE. Minnie, I shall push you off your perch.

MINNIE. Only last week I was saying to that Tom Moonlight, "It's a wonder to me," I said, "that that Percy Middling boy isn't choked with love. His digestion must be tougher than it looks."

JANE. Then in the future I shan't let him show you his digestion.

[*"That* PERCY MIDDLING *boy" re-emerges from his paper.*]

PERCY. Where's Peter to-night?

JANE. He's dining at his club. He's going on to a supper-party later, but he's coming back to change first.

[*The front door bell is heard; it is an electric bell now.*]

JANE. That's Willie.

MINNIE. Ah, the good-for-nothing.

JANE. You said that before.

MINNIE. Very likely, but the man aggravates me. If I was a woman that spoke my mind, he'd hear something.

PERCY. He's never done you any harm?

MINNIE. He ought to have married Jane.

JANE. But you didn't want him to?

MINNIE. Was that what stopped him? He didn't treat you right, and now, when he comes mashing in here, with his eye-glass in his eye, like a down-at-heel lord, it makes me very bad-tempered.

PERCY. Be quiet, Minnie; he'll hear you.

[*For* WILLIE'S *voice is audible in the hall.* PERCY *goes out to meet him.*]

JANE. [*Merrily.*] That eye-glass! I'll have a bet with you, Minnie; which eye do you think it will be in to-day?

MINNIE. The left.

JANE. I say the right. Sixpence?

MINNIE. You're on.

[PERCY *returns with the visitor.* MR. WILLIE RAGG *still frequents a rather too fashionable tailor, and his hair, which is graying, has grown long enough at the sides to form a streaky trellis-work across the desert top. The mustache is slightly waxed, in the fashion of his hey-day, and to that date also belongs the exuberant courtliness of his manner as contrasted with the casual reserve of his modern prototype.*]

WILLIE. Ah, my dear Jane, three months, isn't it? What a pleasure it is to see you again. Percy, you must treat

that girl very well. Do you know, you've altered so little, my dear, that it makes me feel young to see you. A tonic, that's what you are—a tonic.

MINNIE. To be taken in small doses once every three years.

WILLIE. Ah, so there's old Minnie. Men may come and men may go, but Minnie goes on for ever.

MINNIE. Aren't you a very ill-mannered young man? I'm only eighty-six.

JANE. So she is, and a very young eighty-six too.

WILLIE. Well, she's probably younger in spirit than I am.

MINNIE. I'd give you "younger in spirit."

JANE. Minnie, stop quarreling. Well, how have you been, Willie? [*Mischievously.*] Percy should have made you come to dinner.

PERCY. [*When he has recovered.*] Indeed, I would have done, but I thought—I thought that you would be certain to be engaged.

WILLIE. And so I was, my dear fellow, so I was.

[*As he speaks, he fingers a monocle that dangles by a black moiré ribbon.* MINNIE *notices, and, without lowering her voice, comments to* JANE.]

MINNIE. Dead heat.

WILLIE. I beg your pardon?

JANE. Don't take any notice. What were you going to say?

WILLIE. Well, I was going to tell you what I came round about.

JANE. Is it business? If it is, perhaps you'd like me to leave you.

WILLIE. It is business, but I should hate you to leave us. I think you will be interested. The fact is, Percy, I've got on to a rather remarkable thing. When I was at Le Touquet I became friendly with a man called Kalisch. I could tell at once that he was a very clever man; he seemed to take a great fancy to me. Now, it turns out that he's an inventor, and there's an invention of his that he's working upon now and which I'm helping him to finance. Do you follow me?

PERCY. I think so.

WILLIE. Well, I'll tell you all about it.

[*In his eagerness,* WILLIE *puts his monocle to his eye—his right eye.*]

MINNIE. [*To* JANE.] You win.

WILLIE. What's that?

JANE. Minnie, you're not to interrupt. Go on, Willie.

WILLIE. Well, the fact is, the experiments are nearly completed, but they're costly. He has a lot of money of his own in it, and I have put in all I could afford, and now we want to find somebody else to help us over the next few months. He calculates that by January he'll have everything ready for the Patent Office.

PERCY. But what is the invention?

WILLIE. I'll tell you. A fellow's not a fool, as you know. I have been in this world some little time now, and I have kept my eyes open, so that I am the last person on earth to be taken in by any charlatan who comes along and says he's an invention to sell. But this is one of those simple everyday things that anybody might think of and nobody has. How should I explain? Now you, Jane, supposing you're reading the evening paper and Percy grabs at it, what happens?

JANE. Percy never would grab at it.

WILLIE. But supposing he did.

JANE. I should pull his nose.

WILLIE. Very right and proper too. What I mean is, what would happen to the newspaper?

JANE. I have no doubt it would continue to be published as usual.

WILLIE. No, I mean, what would happen to your copy of it—to that particular copy of it?

JANE. It would tear.

WILLIE. [*Profoundly.*] Exactly. Percy, do you realize that? It would tear.

PERCY. Of course, I realize that, but I realized that before.

WILLIE. Take another instance. What shall I say? Suppose you one day, Percy, in a temper threw a book at Peter, what would happen?

JANE. He would miss.

WILLIE. Never mind; supposing he did.

PERCY. Do you want me to say it would tear?

WILLIE. I do.

PERCY. Very well, then. It would tear.

WILLIE. Now you see what follows. It is exactly this point that my friend Kalisch seized upon. He, too, realized that paper will tear; in fact, for years that has been almost the only fact that he has been conscious of. That fact has preyed upon and worried his brain until his wife thought that he might lose his reason. But what has been the result? For the last eighteen months he has devoted himself to the invention of a paper that will not tear, and he is now within a few weeks of success.

[*He pauses portentously, and looks round him for acclamation.*]

MINNIE. [*At length.*] Damn fool.

WILLIE. Ah, Minnie, that is what has been said about all pioneers. But, mark my words, within a very few years paper will not be made of paper at all. [*With great gravity.*] It will be made of rubber.

JANE. And what will rubber be made of?

WILLIE. Leather.

PERCY. My dear Ragg, you're not serious.

WILLIE. I am; perfectly serious. What I've said is an exaggerated way of putting it, of course, but my friend's invention that will take the place of paper is a preparation

consisting partly of rubber and partly of leather; specially treated cowhide.

JANE. And where does he find the rubber cows?

WILLIE. You may laugh, my dear, but just wait. You'll see, you'll see.

PERCY. But the expense?

WILLIE. Ah, you've put your finger on the heart of it. That is the problem we're working at now. Have you ever heard of by-products, waste-products? That is the keynote of the whole scheme. We need rubber and we need cowhide. But my friend has calculated that in London alone enough rubber is wasted every month to manufacture a hundred thousand ton of paper.

JANE. And are enough cows wasted too?

WILLIE. [*Amiably patronizing.*] Dear Jane! Always so womanly! Take a simple instance. You tumble off a bus, Percy. What happens? You lose the rubber heel off your shoe. At present who wants it? No one. It lies in the road solitary and neglected. But that will all be changed. My friend will want it; my friend will be after it quick and lively. My friend will have seized on it almost before it has stopped rolling, before you have regained consciousness. He'll want it for his untearable rubber-leather paper.

JANE. But doesn't it occur to you, Willie, that a world in which paper will not tear is likely to be even more inconvenient than a world in which it does?

WILLIE. No, I can see no inconvenience in that; nor does my friend Kalisch.

JANE. Well, tell me this; supposing Percy were to light his pipe with a spill of your friend's paper, would the room be filled with a smell of burning rubber or of—of roast beef?

WILLIE. My friend's paper will not burn.

PERCY. But imagine a world in which paper will not burn!

WILLIE. I have already done so, and I do so still without misgiving. Anyhow, there it is. I put the whole thing in untechnical language, but if you would like to meet my friend Kalisch he could explain it better than I. What do you say?

PERCY. Well, I am not a speculative man, and, as I am sure you'll find plenty of people only too anxious to make an investment of that kind, I think I'll leave it alone.

WILLIE. As you will, as you will. You'll be sorry one day, but I shall have no difficulty in finding the money, and certainly wouldn't persuade you. Still, while we're talking about money, I don't mind telling you, as an old friend, that I'm in rather low water at the moment myself. Amusing, isn't it? Of course, things will right themselves quite soon, but it did occur to me, as I walked here to-night, that you might be glad of the opportunity to give me a hand out. Nothing big, of course—just a hundred or two. Mind you, plenty of people I know would be ready and eager to advance it, but I said to myself, "No, I ought to give Percy Middling the chance first. We've been friends all these years." [PERCY *is about to speak.*] No, no, don't thank me. The obligations of friendship are something that we needn't talk about. Men like you and me understand.

PERCY. I was only going to say that if fifty pounds would be any good to you—

WILLIE. Well, fifty pounds wouldn't come amiss, but to be quite frank with you—

[*At this moment* PETER, *a fine, nice-looking boy of about twenty-three, opens the door, and closes it a trifle mysteriously behind him.*]

PETER. [*Not too loudly.*] I say, I've—I've brought a woman into the house.

JANE. Peter!

PETER. No, listen. I think she's ill. She looks it. [*To* WILLIE, *parenthetically.*] Good evening, sir.

WILLIE. Good evening, Peter.

PERCY. But who is she?

PETER. I haven't the faintest idea.

WILLIE. [*Delighted.*] Well, what do you say to that!

[*He laughs boisterously.*]

PERCY. Haven't the faintest idea?

PETER. No, but I can find out.

JANE. How did you meet her?

PETER. Outside, in the street.

JANE. Peter, is she a—is she—

PETER. I don't know what she is. I only know she's ill and—and somehow strange. I'd noticed her hanging about

the house several times during the last few days, and she'd always looked at me queerly. She seemed very down and out. And to-night she seemed half frozen and exhausted, and—well, I couldn't pass her without speaking, so I just said, "Do you feel ill?" She didn't answer at first—simply looked at me. Then she said, "What's your Christian name?" I said "Peter." Then came the strange thing. She looked across the square as though I weren't there, and muttered to herself, "Peter—Peter Middling!"

JANE. My dear!

PETER. I said, "How did you know that?" She took no notice, but asked me how long we'd been in this house. I told her, and she said, almost in a whisper, "So your grandfather is dead?" When I said he wasn't, she just looked at me and began to move away. But I wouldn't let her. She looked so bad, and I made her come in. There, that's what happened. She's waiting in the hall.

WILLIE. Well, I'll be blowed!

JANE. Anyhow, we can't keep her hanging about in the hall.

PERCY. [*To* PETER.] What do you want us to do?

PETER. I don't know. See to her, that's all.

MINNIE. Peter. [*It is apparently a summons with a definite and traditional meaning, for* PETER *goes to her as a matter of course and lifts her from her perch on to the floor.*] I'll go and have a look at her.

PERCY. [*A little puzzled.*] I don't know that you should have done this, Peter.

WILLIE. Other times, other customs. In our day you and I wouldn't have done it, Percy; but you must be broad-minded. Boys will be boys.

JANE. Don't be absurd, Willie; you haven't understood at all.

WILLIE. [*Knowingly.*] I am older than you, my dear. Tell me, Peter, is she very beautiful?

PETER. No, I don't think she's beautiful at all. She's rather ragged, not very clean, and, as far as I remember, rather ugly.

[*But this is only almost true, as we shall see in a minute. For* MINNIE *now comes back hand in hand with* THE VISITOR. *It is true that her clothes are very, very shabby, her shoes and stockings muddy, her face dead-white and her eyes unhealthily large. It is true that wisps of hair the color of burnt straw hang carelessly and untended from beneath her hat; but, for all that, it is clear to those of us who can see below the surface that she is not really less pretty than was* MRS. SARAH MOONLIGHT *fifty years ago. She walks slowly, but is unabashed, and smiles a dim, friendly smile.*]

JANE. Come along and sit down here by the fire.

THE VISITOR. I'd like to, but don't let me be a trouble to you. [*On her way to the chair that* PETER *is setting for her she takes a second look at* JANE.] Are you my—are you Peter's mother?

JANE. Yes, I am.

THE VISITOR. [*Smiling upon her approvingly.*] Well now, there now.

PERCY. You'd like something to eat, wouldn't you?

THE VISITOR. [*Turning slowly towards him, speaking half to herself.*] And that is Percy Middling.

JANE. How do you know his name?

THE VISITOR. [*Patting* JANE'S *hand just as though she were her daughter.*] Ah, you mustn't ask me a lot of questions. [*Then, as she speaks, she sways a little, and* PETER, *going quickly to her side, leads her to the chair. After she has been sitting a moment or two she speaks again.*] I'm all right really; don't bother about me. It's just that I haven't been very well lately. I have had a kind of pain here. [*She put her hands on her heart.*] But I'm better now.

JANE. Do you feel well enough to come with me and have something to eat?

THE VISITOR. Yes, quite well enough, but I am not hungry. I have eaten already. It is merely that I am cold.

PETER. Then you'd better have a drink. I'll mix you a whisky.

[*And he goes to the decanter.*]

THE VISITOR. No, I'd rather not, thank you. I hate the taste of whisky.

PETER. Then you must take it as a medicine. I hate the taste of whisky, too, but I still frequently take it for pleasure.

[*He hands her a glass and, grimacing, she drinks.*]

THE VISITOR. [*Handing the glass back to* PETER.] Wasn't I good? Now, Peter, come and sit down here. [*She indicates the arm of her chair.*] You've got to tell me all about yourself.

[*The others look at each other in perplexity at this self-assurance.*]

PETER. [*Complying.*] Well, there isn't much to tell.

THE VISITOR. There's a great deal to tell. Are you at Oxford or Cambridge?

PETER. No, I've just come down.

THE VISITOR. From which?

PETER. Oxford.

THE VISITOR. Like your grandfather, eh?

PETER. [*Perplexed.*] Yes; but how did you know?

THE VISITOR. There, darling, don't ask me questions; let me ask you.

WILLIE. [*Involuntarily.*] Darling!

[*But* THE VISITOR *hears him.*]

THE VISITOR. [*Fixing her eye on him for a moment.*] I know you; at least, I think so.

WILLIE. Alas, madam, I'm afraid you do not.

THE VISITOR. [*Her brows knit.*] Yes, I do. Wait a moment. Isn't it Georgie—Mr. Georgie Ragg? No, Willie Ragg.

WILLIE. Well, I'm blowed! How did you know that? I don't think we've ever met?

JANE. Who are you? Do tell us.

THE VISITOR. I? I'm just an old lady who has rather come down in the world.

PERCY. Old, indeed!

THE VISITOR. I used to teach the piano and play a little at concerts, but concerts got rarer and rarer, and so did the pupils. You see, my methods of teaching became old-fashioned. [*As she speaks, her eye falls on a photograph of* TOM MOONLIGHT. *Her expression sobers at once, and, heedless of the others, she moves slowly towards it. For a moment or two she contemplates the picture in silence, and then, without turning, asks gravely:*] Where is he?

PETER. [*The first to recall himself.*] He's upstairs.

THE VISITOR. Can I see him?

JANE. No, I'm afraid not possibly. You see, he's a very old gentleman. He'd be asleep now. We have to take great care of him.

[*But unobtrusively* MINNIE *slips out of the room.*]

THE VISITOR. I see. Was this photo just taken?

JANE. That? That was taken before the war.

THE VISITOR. [*With difficulty.*] He—looks older now?

JANE. Oh, yes, a lot.

THE VISITOR. Peter's like him.

JANE. He was as a child.

THE VISITOR. Is he well?

JANE. Well, he is very feeble. The doctor isn't very pleased with him. His memory's gone, and he really doesn't recognize people. He hasn't recognized any of us for months.

THE VISITOR. Poor Mr. Moonlight! Darling Mr. Moonlight.

PETER. He hasn't really been the same since my grandmother died.

THE VISITOR. [*Mainly to herself.*] Your—your grandmother.

PETER. You know, you can see him to-morrow all right.

[*But at that moment the door opens and* MR. MOONLIGHT, *leaning heavily on* MINNIE, *himself appears. He is wearing a heavy dressing-gown, and* MINNIE *has wrapped a thick muffler about his neck. He aids himself also with a rubber-tipped stick. Everybody, except* THE VISITOR, *starts at this apparition.*]

JANE. Father!

[*For a moment he looks at them all without recognition, and then he notices* THE VISITOR. *He evinces no surprise.*]

TOM. Ah, my dear, I've been asleep.

THE VISITOR. [*Clearly, naturally, though her face is drained of all color.*] Yes, Tom.

TOM. Has Edith gone?

THE VISITOR. Edith? Yes, dear, she's gone.

TOM. Good. I'm worried about Edith. [*He sits down.*] Worried about what you told me this morning. Here, my dear. [THE VISITOR *goes to him.*] I've been thinking it over, and I believe you're right. Edith *is* in love with me.

THE VISITOR. Of course she is, darling. We all are.

TOM. Including you, eh? This morning you had a very different story; then it was "except me."

THE VISITOR. Was it, Mr. Moonlight? Perhaps I've grown older since then.

TOM. Have you, indeed? Well, I'll tell you a secret. I never believed you. You love me very much indeed.

THE VISITOR. Clever Mr. Moonlight!

TOM. Am I right?

THE VISITOR. You're right, blessed.

[*And the old man chuckles with delight. Then suddenly he looks at her.*]

TOM. Hey, hey, now where's that dress?

THE VISITOR. What dress?

TOM. What dress indeed! Why, your birthday dress, of course; *my* dress.

THE VISITOR. Oh, it's—it's put away.

TOM. [*A little piteously.*] Don't you like it?

[*It is now that* MINNIE *starts delving mysteriously among voluminous tissue paper in the bottom drawer of the tall-boy.*]

THE VISITOR. Of course I like it, but I can't wear it always.

TOM. This morning you sang to me in it.

THE VISITOR. I remember, darling.

TOM. Sarah.

THE VISITOR. Yes, dear.

TOM. Please wear the pink dress.

THE VISITOR. I can't, dearest. Let me wear it some other time.

MINNIE. She'll wear it for you now. I've had it all put away safe. Here now.

[*And there it is, a little crumpled and smelling mightily of camphor.*]

THE VISITOR. Is it—is it all right, Minnie?

MINNIE. Of course it's all right.

TOM. That's not it.

MINNIE. Indeed it is.

TOM. I tell you there were more blue bows on it.

MINNIE. And *I* tell you there never were.

[*As they argue,* THE VISITOR *slips out quietly with the dress.*]

TOM. [*Chuckling a little.*] The blue bows! That was Madame Chose's idea. I was against it.

MINNIE. Well, there's more pink than blue, and the pink was your idea. And I must go and help.

[*She follows* THE VISITOR.]

PETER. [*Gently.*] Grandpa, who's that?

TOM. Eh? Who's that? Why, that's my wife, young man. Who do you think it is?

PETER. Why do you think it's your wife, grandpa?

TOM. Why do I think so? Heavens, oughn't I to know my own wife? Who are you?

PETER. I'm Peter.

TOM. Well, I don't know you, sir, and I don't much want to.

PETER. I think your wife's very pretty, grandpa.

TOM. [*Won over at once.*] Do you, Mr. Peter? And she is too. That's what they all say. And, what's more, she don't alter. Do you know that? She don't alter. [*And then he mutters to himself, musing.*] Don't alter! Now, what's that bit about altering? She's worried about that, ain't she? There's something about altering. I don't like that bit. I've forgotten it.

PETER. Grandpa, what is your wife called?

TOM. Eh? She's called Sarah. Sarah Jones before she met me. [*Then a little dim chuckle.*] I'll tell you something, if you want to know. She used to say that's why she married me. See? Couldn't stand Sarah Jones at any price.

JANE. [*Softly.*] He—he thinks it's his first wife.

TOM. What do they say? Don't they like my Sarah?

PETER. Of course they do. Especially me, grandpa. I think she's lovely.

TOM. That's right, Mr. Peter. And I'll tell you another thing, if you won't let it go any farther. We've got a little daughter, and, between you and me, when she grows up she's going to be just as pretty.

PETER. I'm sure she is, grandpa.

TOM. And she's called Jane.

PETER. [*Gently.*] Would you like to see her, grandpa?

[*So* JANE *steps forward.*]

TOM. [*Although he sees her.*] Oh, no, she's been in bed a long time. [PETER *is about to attempt an explanation, but* JANE, *with a gesture, stops him.*] Where's Sarah?

PETER. She's coming in a minute.

[*And there is* THE VISITOR *again, dressed in poor* SARAH MOONLIGHT'S *pink frock, and looking just as beautiful, with* MINNIE *in attendance. With her finger to her mouth, she motions the others not to tell the old gentleman that she has come back. Then, as they watch her in silence, she moves quietly to the piano and, seating herself, plays a few slow, scarcely audible chords.* MR. MOONLIGHT *listens while in a sweet voice* THE VISITOR *sings to him an old song of Mendelssohn's.*]

> Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove,
> Far away, far away would I rove—

[*As she sings,* MR. MOONLIGHT, *beaming, rises, crosses to her chair, and sits upon the edge of it, just as he sat beside* MRS. MOONLIGHT *fifty years ago. The song is*

finished, the last chords die away, and THE VISITOR, *like* MRS. MOONLIGHT *fifty years ago, strikes the first raucous notes of "Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle"; but, unlike* MRS. MOONLIGHT, *she cannot go on. Her eyes brim up, she chokes a little, she presses her handkerchief to her nose. Her other hand old* TOM MOONLIGHT *is holding tight, tight.*]

TOM. [*At length; almost in a whisper.*] I'm a very lucky man, Mrs. Moonlight. [THE VISITOR *cannot yet trust herself to speak, but she nods her assent.*] And a very, very happy man, eh?

THE VISITOR. [*Smiling.*] Yes, darling.

TOM. And you're a very happy woman, Mrs. Moonlight.

THE VISITOR. Very happy, Tom. I think I've never been so happy in my life as I am now.

TOM. But think of the luck of it! There are millions of women in England; why should it just happen that of them all I should meet you? Because I'm certain of this, Mrs. Moonlight: I could never, never be happy with any woman *but* you.

THE VISITOR. [*Almost merrily.*] That's what *you* think, Mr. Moonlight.

TOM. It's what I know. [*Then, more soberly.*] Poor Edith. I'm worried about Edith. I wish we could find a husband for her. Sarah, I think I shall go to bed. I'm feeling tired—and sleepy.

THE VISITOR. Yes, darling, then you go.

[*He rises with her help.*]

TOM. Are you coming up now?

THE VISITOR. No, dear, not just yet; but I won't wake you.

TOM. You may; you may. Good night.

[*He kisses her.*]

THE VISITOR. Good night, darling. [*And, with* MINNIE *in attendance, he goes. For a moment or two after the door closes there is silence. Then abruptly* THE VISITOR *turns to the others. Her face is radiant; not even* SARAH MOONLIGHT *could have looked lovelier, her eyes half closed as she breathes.*] Oh, I'm so happy.

[*The clock strikes the half-hour.*]

PERCY. [*Striving for normality.*] Er—that's half-past nine.

PETER. [*Coming to himself.*] Yes, I suppose I ought to go and change. [*To* THE VISITOR, *half apologetic, half fascinated.*] I promised to go to a party.

THE VISITOR. Have you, Peter? [*Coaxing.*] Don't go to your party to-night. Sit and talk to me.

PETER. Well—I'd like to, but— [*He breaks off.*]

THE VISITOR. But what?

PETER. But nothing really, I suppose. I'd rather sit and talk to you.

THE VISITOR. Nice Peter.

JANE. But can you get out of it?

PETER. Yes, it won't matter. There are plenty of them. I'll ring up in the morning.

WILLIE. [*Teasing him.*] Are you sure you oughtn't to go, Peter?

THE VISITOR. Why do you want him to?

WILLIE. [*Gallantly.*] Then I could stay and talk to you in his place.

THE VISITOR. As gallant as ever, Mr. Ragg. [*Mischievously.*] Tell me, sir, have you been to Paris lately?

WILLIE. [*A little puzzled.*] Not for some months. Why?

THE VISITOR. Fancy that, and a fellow loves Paris, too. But perhaps you meet her somewhere else, then?

WILLIE. Meet who?

THE VISITOR. Oh, fickleness! Why, Joy, of course.

WILLIE. Upon my soul, I don't know who you're talking about.

THE VISITOR. Forgotten Joy? And she was so sweet, too. At least, I believe you thought so. You'll tell me next that you were never engaged to Jane.

WILLIE. Certainly I was engaged to Jane.

THE VISITOR. And why did you never marry her, pray?

WILLIE. Because she threw me over, madam.

THE VISITOR. Oh, Jane, how could you? [*To* WILLIE.] And for no reason?

WILLIE. No doubt she had her own reasons.

THE VISITOR. Perhaps she liked Mr. Percy Middling better?

WILLIE. [*Involuntarily.*] Good heavens, no! It was simply that her parents persuaded her.

THE VISITOR. And it had nothing to do with Joy?

WILLIE. I tell you I know nothing about Joy. To the best of my knowledge, I have never known a Joy.

THE VISITOR. In any case, a fellow can't be expected to remember every one.

JANE. [*A little awed.*] Who are you?

THE VISITOR. [*Smiling at her.*] Poor puzzled Jane!

[*She takes her hand and pats it between her own, as though she were a small girl.*]

JANE. How do you know all about us? Please tell us who you are.

THE VISITOR. Just an old woman who's feeling rather more light of heart than she should at her age.

JANE. But that doesn't tell us anything.

THE VISITOR. If I told you any more, my child, I should be more mysterious, not less.

[*They don't notice* MINNIE'S *return until she speaks.*]

MINNIE. He's asking for you.

[*There is something foreboding in her voice, and it is*

with large, grave eyes that THE VISITOR *follows* MINNIE *slowly, almost, as it were, reluctantly, while the others look on in silence. That silence continues for a moment after she has gone, until at length* JANE *breaks it.*]

JANE. Percy, I'm nervous.

PERCY. [*Reassuring himself at the same time as her.*] It's all right, my dear. There's nothing to be nervous about. What is there to be nervous of?

JANE. I don't know. It wouldn't be so bad if I knew. It's just because I don't know.

PETER. But she won't do you any harm, mother. How can she? Why should she?

JANE. I want to know who she is. Why does she behave so strangely, talk so strangely? Why does she treat me like a little child?

WILLIE. My dear, she's probably a little bit—

[*He taps his forehead significantly.*]

JANE. That doesn't explain how she knows all about us; all our names, all our history.

PERCY. Perhaps she knows somebody who knows us all. It may all be a joke somebody's playing on us.

PETER. It doesn't seem as if she's playing a joke. She doesn't seem that kind of person.

JANE. Why does father think he knows her? Why does she talk to him quite naturally, as though they have known each other all their lives? He thinks it's my mother.

PERCY. Well, surely that isn't very mysterious, my dear. After all, your father hasn't known any one for months, and it's just as reasonable that he might think he knows this girl.

JANE. [*Nervously, almost with awe.*] But there's something else.

[*They wait for her to go on, but she doesn't.*]

PERCY. What's that?

JANE. I won't say, I can't say.

PETER. Why, is it so terrible?

JANE. I think it is.

PERCY. Never mind. It can't be so terrible that you can't tell me.

JANE. [*Coming to a decision, and suddenly facing them.*] Very well, then. I tell you I know who she is. You'll think I'm mad. It's Joy.

PERCY. Jane!

PETER. Who is Joy?

JANE. My cousin. She lives in Italy, or used to.

WILLIE. She kept talking about a Joy.

PERCY. But this is a girl, my dear, and Joy's as old as you are.

JANE. I know. I can't explain it. I just feel it. It isn't merely the resemblance, though they're as like as two peas.

PERCY. But how can you remember what Joy was like? You haven't seen her for over twenty-five years.

JANE. But I do remember. I've never forgotten her.

PERCY. Perhaps this is Joy's daughter. That might account for her knowing all about us.

WILLIE. Yes, there's an idea. How about that?

JANE. But, if it is, why should she come back, and, before any of us can—

[*And then the door opens and* MINNIE *is there again. How small she suddenly seems!* JANE *breaks off, and all of them, with unaccountable foreboding in their hearts, wait for her to speak. At last she does.*]

MINNIE. Well—well, he's dead.

[*For a second or two no one stirs. Then* JANE, *her voice hardly above a whisper.*]

JANE. Minnie!

MINNIE. She was with him. He was in her arms. [*At length the spell loosens;* PERCY *goes to the telephone and* JANE *a step or two towards the door.*] I shouldn't go. Just bide a wee.

[*But it is not only* MINNIE'S *voice that arrests them. Almost before they see her they feel* THE VISITOR *is coming. They wait, watching the door, and, walking slowly, slowly, she comes, looking at nobody, oblivious of everybody. Her face has no tragic mask; indeed, there is a strange, almost unearthly content upon it. In the middle of the room she*

stops. JANE *takes a few steps towards her, but* THE VISITOR, *without looking, without turning her head, speaks.*]

THE VISITOR. It's all right. I'm all right, quite all right. I don't want any help . . . I'm not unhappy . . . It was really very—very beautiful. It would be wicked to be unhappy . . . I'm only—only very tired. [*She sways a little, and her left hand flutters to her breast.*] I wonder why I'm so tired. [*Gently* PETER *leads her to her chair. She lies back in it and her eyes close.*] Thank you, Peter. . . . He just said to me, "I love you, Mrs. Moonlight, very, very dearly." He just said that. . . . He looked happy, too. [*The seconds go by in silence.*] Jane. Where's Jane?

JANE. [*Gently.*] Here I am.

THE VISITOR. Where's your hand? [JANE *gives it to her.*] That's right. I'm so pleased with you, Jane. . . . I've always liked your nice Percy Middling, and you've done well together, haven't you? A nice boy and a nice home. [*She pauses again.*] "I love you, Mrs. Moonlight, very, very dearly." [PETER *is holding her other hand, for he has not let it go.*] Peter, are you listening?

PETER. [*Taking her hand in both of his.*] Of course I am. What is it?

THE VISITOR. Peter, I want you always—always to be a good boy. . . . You are now, aren't you?

PETER. Why, I don't know.

THE VISITOR. But *I* know. You're a very good boy . . . any grandmother [*she repeats the word, and savors it strangely*]—grandmother—would be glad of you. . . .

But you've got to be a good boy always. Like Tom. . . . Do you see? Just keep yourself—gentle. . . . Like Tom. . . . Just gentle. [*She sighs.*] Oh, I'm so tired. . . . "I love you, Mrs. Moonlight, very, very dearly." . . . Jane, do I look happy?

JANE. Very happy, dear. Are you?

THE VISITOR. Oh, so happy. [*There is again a long pause. Again her hand moves involuntarily to her left breast. When she speaks again she is hardly audible.*] It's funny to be so tired. Perhaps—perhaps. . . . Oh, how lovely. . . . Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant . . . depart in peace . . . for my eyes have seen . . . mine eyes have seen. . . .

[*Her lips move again, but no sound is heard. There is a little happy smile round her mouth, and then her head falls heavily on her shoulder and the hand that was to her heart drops over the arm of the chair. Every one except* MINNIE *makes a little involuntary movement of concern, but no one dares to break the silence.*]

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